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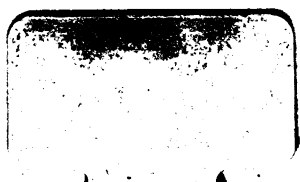
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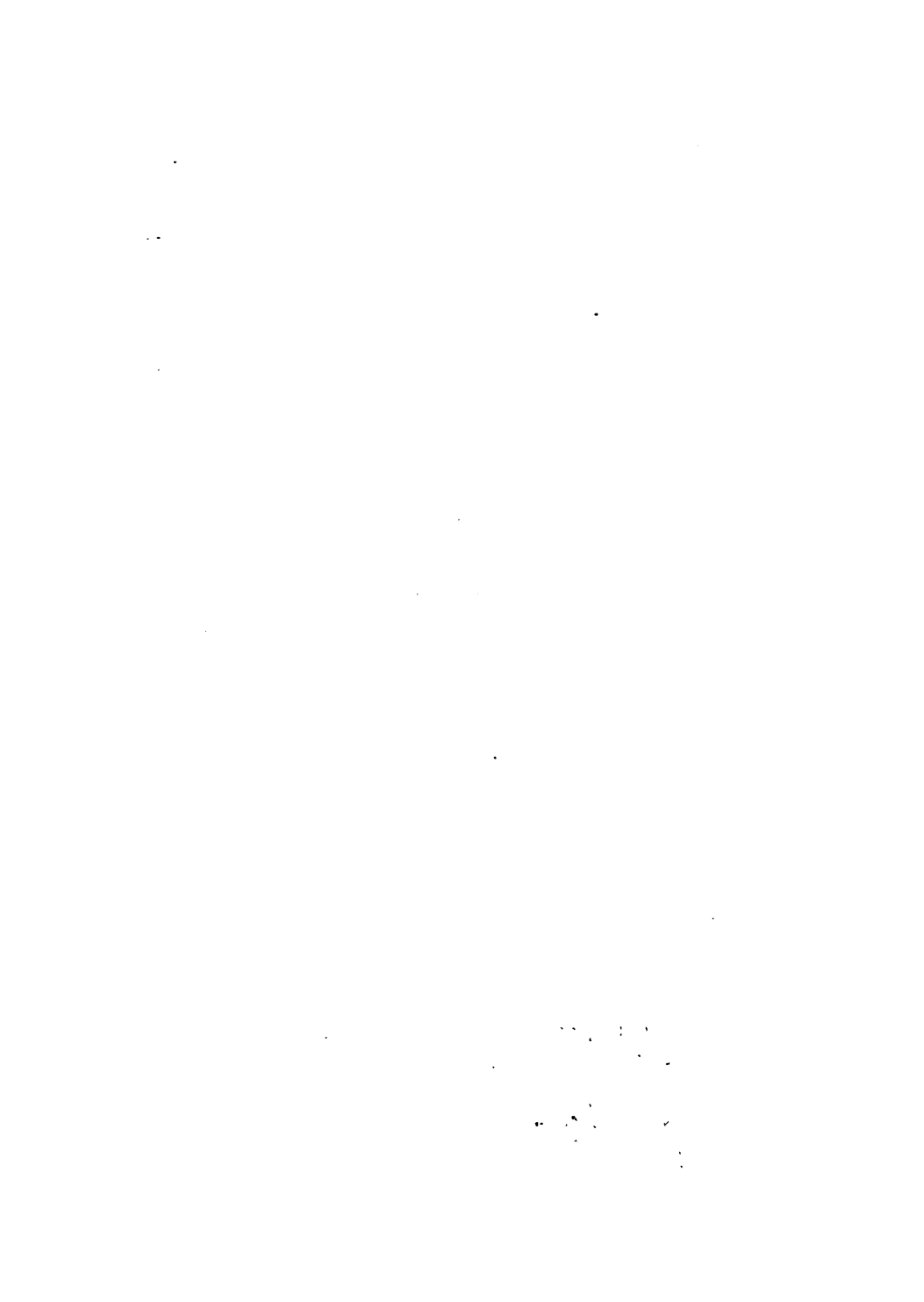
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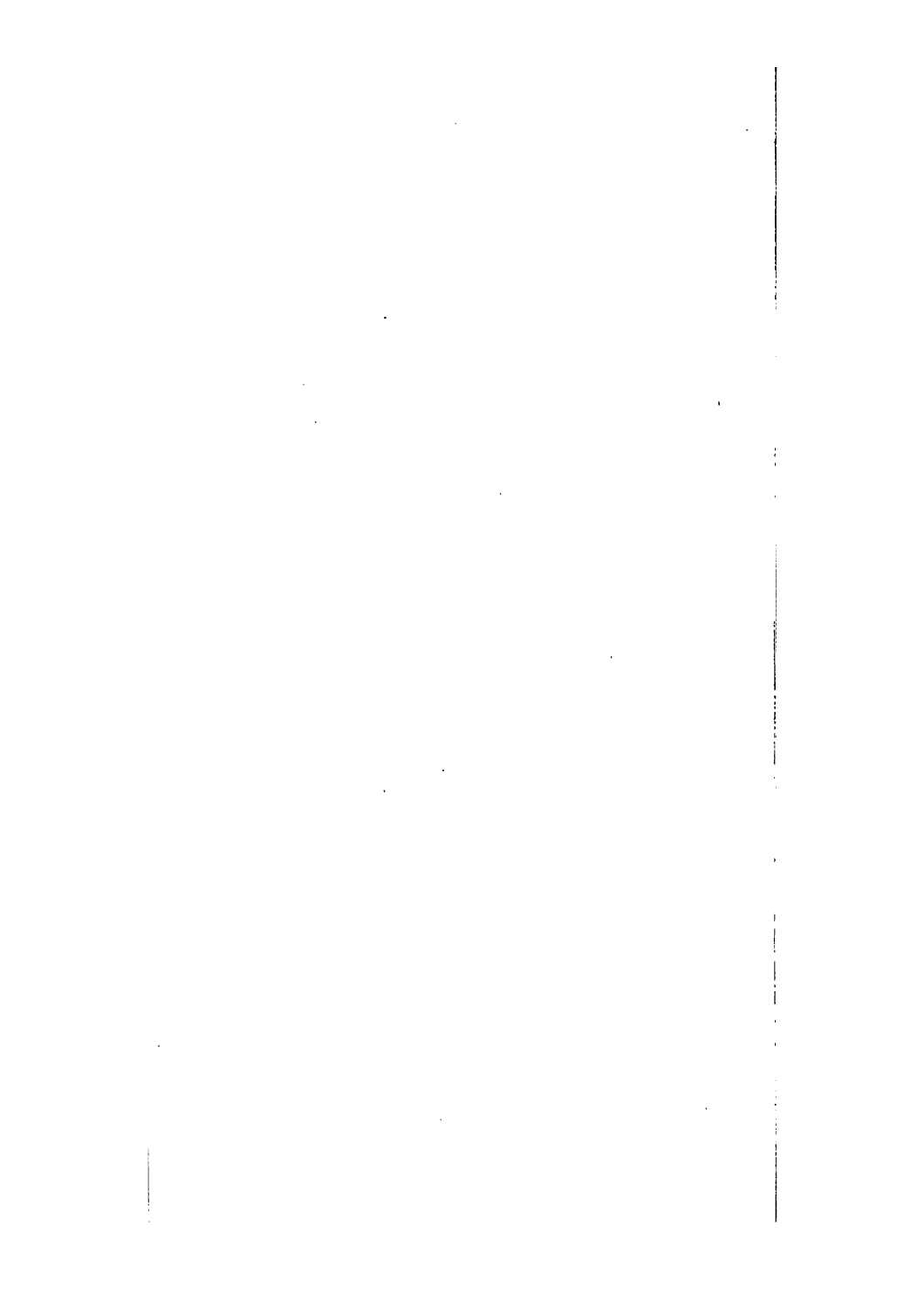
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THREE ESSAYS
ON
GRACE, FAITH, AND EXPERIENCE;
WHEREIN SEVERAL
GOSPEL TRUTHS
ARE
STATED AND ILLUSTRATED,
AND
THEIR OPPOSITE ERRORS POINTED OUT.

BY S. ECKING.

*This is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand, 1 Peter iv. 12.
Earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto
the Saints. Jude v. 4.
Experience worketh Hope. Rom. v. 4.*

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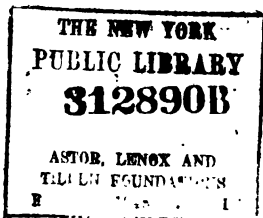
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1. Grace

2. Faith



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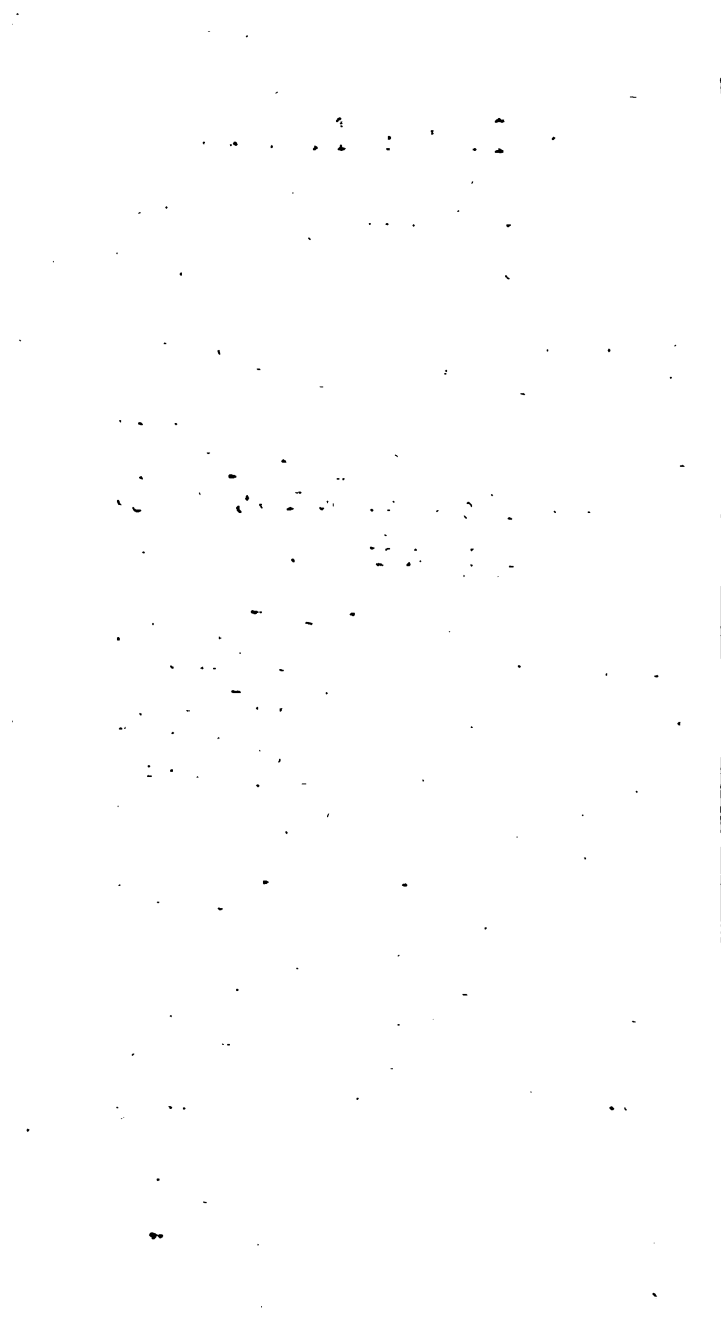
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T H E P R E F A C E.

IT has been observed that in controversies about religion most parties, however wide in their sentiments, have claimed the authority and countenance of scripture for their respective notions. Some on this account have been disposed to fix the charge of inconsistency upon the sacred records; and others, for the same reason, have thought it necessary to have some certain rules to interpret scripture by. Hence traditions, church-authority, creeds, confessions of faith, &c. have been multiplied in great abundance, and are in general thought better calculated to guard against heresy, than that book which is appealed to by all heretics.—The church of Rome has deservedly been held up to public ridicule, for her pretensions to infallibility, and for keeping the people in ignorance, by prohibiting the reading of the scriptures: happy day that was therefore which began the dawn of *Reformation*. But does it not lead us back to *ROME*, to condemn *free inquiry*, from the fear of innovation? What essential difference is there between having the scripture wholly kept from our eyes, and suffering our understanding, judgment, and conscience to be limited by articles, church-authority, &c.? Do not these limitations tend to shut us up in as gross darkness, as our ancestors were covered with, by receiving papal tradition in the room of divine revelation?—The preaching of *Fulgentio* at *Venice*, on Pilate's question *What is truth?* is not foreign to our purpose. He told his hearers that at last, after many researches, he had found it out, and holding out a New-testament, said that it was in his hand; but he put it in his pocket, and coldly added, "*The Book is prohibited.*" What difference would there have been had he said, you may read the book, but

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its true meaning is prohibited? But what has been the consequence of introducing this method of preventing heresies and schisms? plainly this (not to say any thing about extirpation, &c) many have, as it were insensibly, been led, to make tradition, and church-authority their *faith*; and have become the dupes of superstition, while they have professed to be guided by the word of God! Yet since all spirits must be tried by the scriptures—since all true church-authority must be founded there—and since if any man speak not according to the form of sound words recorded there, it is because there is no light in him, where can Christians appeal but to the scriptures? The e they are well assured, are able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* The writer of the following pages might tell his reader of his connections with those who are reputed *orthodox*; but as one justly observes, “Orthodoxy (like almost all martial terms of controvertists) is a very vague, equivocal word.—In its original and true import, it signifies a *right belief*: but, (such is the fate of language!) in one latitude it means a belief of one thing, in another the belief of another thing, quite contrary. In these Essays, let it stand for what Paul calls *the belief of the truth*, not the belief of the truth as it is in this creed, or in that, or in any other, but *as it is in Jesus*.”—He presents them to the reader’s serious attention submissively and impartially to be tried by the heavenly oracles, in their most simple and obvious meaning, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things; assuring him, that he wishes them to have no other influence, than what they may have borrowed from thence.—His grand design is to recommend the disallowed Gospel as the ONE THING NEEDFUL; as that alone which
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can give peace at the last, and land a sinner safe and happy on the eternal shore. The glorious gospel, in its primitive simplicity, freeness and glory, stands opposed, on the one hand, to self-righteousness and self-dependance in all its forms; and, on the other, to carnal confidence, worldly-mindedness, and self-indulgence: for while it makes ample provision for the most wretched circumstances, a sinner can be in, by laying a sufficient foundation for his hope in the Redeemer's finished work; it exhibits the most powerful incentives to true godliness, and makes the keeping of Christ's commands essential to the Christian character. On this account it is expected that the *self-righteous* and the *licentious* (however ambiguously they hold those tenets, which lead them to self-dependance and self-indulgence) will be much disgusted with what they find in the following pages: and the writer frankly acknowledges that he has not designed, in a single line, to please either of them; but on the contrary has endeavoured to set forth his sentiments in such a light, as to stand in direct opposition to their notions of christianity.—The doctrines opposed are mostly stated in the very words of some who have written in favor of them, but without particularizing with the author's name; the reason of which is, that *persons* or particular *parties* are not attacked, but *errors*, let them be found with what persons or parties so ever. The same method has been occasionally observed; in regard to those who have maintained the doctrines herein stated; and when the reader is referred to an author's name, it is not with the least design, either to rest the sentiment upon his credit, or screen the writer from censure, under covert of another's reputation: for though he highly esteems their writings, who have been valiant for the truth, yet if ten thousand writers, in the highest reputation for orthodoxy, could be produced in confirmation of what is here said, unless they were prefaced with, *Thus saith the Lord*, they will

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only stand as so many insignificant cyphers, in the esteem of those who have *an ear to hear what the spirit saith unto the churches*. On the other hand, if the reasoning of these Essays be found to accord with the *word of truth*, it will be a very small circumstance with discerning Christians, though the wise, the learned, or the seemingly religious should unite to reprobate the book, and load its author with reproach; for what are the highest sounding names among men, to the name and authority of CHRIST? And what should Christians fear, though their faith and practice provoke the contempt of nations? Would any strange thing happen to them if it should be so? nay verily, for so persecuted they the prophets and apostles, which have gone before them.—

The writer has nothing to say in favor of the *manner* in which this work is executed. He makes no pretension to accuracy of language, or refinement of style; but is conscious of many deficiencies in each of these respects. All he aims at is to convey his meaning, in the most simple and intelligible manner he can. If he has made known what he intended, by what he has declared; the *summit* of his attempt, as to *manner*, is obtained.—If it should please the great Prophet of the church, who alone can teach to profit, to make use of these hints, to convince any of the error of their way, or to confirm the souls of the disciples; the author's labors will be richly rewarded: but if, after comparing what is written with the Bible, that infallible standard of truth, any should be disposed to condemn it as *heretical*; he has no higher court to appeal to. He is persuaded, in his own mind, that the remarks are grounded upon the evidence of Moses and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles; but is very willing to allow, what indeed every man has an equal right to, the right of private judgment: and can say no more than *I speak as to wise men*, JUDGE YE what I say, and *Let EVERY MAN be fully persuaded in his OWN mind*. Three

THREE ESSAYS

ON

GRACE, FAITH, AND EXPERIENCE.

ESSAY FIRST.

Of the Nature, Purpose, Manifestation, Word, Spirit, and Principle of GRACE, as set forth in Scripture light.

SECTION I.

Of the Nature of GRACE in general.

THE doctrine maintained by the apostles of Christ, is distinguished from every scheme framed by the wisdom of men, in that it is a system of *pure grace*. They asserted, that man must stand before his maker either upon the footing of the *law of works*; or the *gospel of grace*. Upon the former ground they fully demonstrate, that no flesh living can be accepted, because the *whole world* is become *guilty* before God, and so justly condemned by his law; therefore they assert, that if any of the fallen race of Adam are saved, it must be by sovereign grace *alone*. In the apostles' days, however, many asserted with them that salvation was of grace, who yet meant something thereby very different, from the obvious sense of their words; and it is hardly to be questioned, that the greatest part of those who call themselves christians, in our day, will affirm in like manner, that we are saved by *grace*; while yet, when they come to explain themselves upon the point,

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point, few will be found to understand the term, in the sense in which it is plain the apostles used it.—The inspired witnesses, aware of the errors which many ran into in their own day, about *grace*; and also of the more general opposition that would be made against it after their decease; declared themselves upon the subject, with the greatest precision. Thus when Peter had written upon the truth of the gospel, he tells those who had received his doctrine, *This is the TRUE grace of God wherein ye stand*, 1 Peter, v. 12. It was Paul's peculiar consolation that the Colossians knew the grace of God IN TRUTH; Col. i. 6. that is, as opposed to every falshood, or counterfeit of it: they had been taught *the truth as it is in Jesus*, and so had received the grace of God in incorruption. And it was his grief to find, that the Galatians had *fallen from grace*; Gal. v. 4. that is, if we attend to what he says in the beginning of this epistle, they had received a *perverted* gospel, which led them to entertain wrong notions of the *true grace* of God. In his epistle to the Hebrews, he exhorts professing believers to *Watch diligently; lest any man fail of the grace of God*; &c. Heb. xii. 15.

Now as every one chuses to affix his own notion to the words of scripture he has occasion to use; and seeing that an error about *grace* is, of all others, the most dangerous, yea the very source of all other errors, under a profession of religion, and must therefore prove fatal, if not perceived and corrected; it is needful that we should search diligently, into the *true* nature of that *grace* which is revealed, and by which alone we can be saved.

Grace, in the scriptures of truth, stands in direct opposition to *works* of every kind, and every degree; so that it is utterly impossible there should be any, even the least mixture of the one with the other; for such is the purity of *grace*, and so opposite in its nature to human *works*, that a coalition would destroy its very being; *grace* would be no more *grace*.

grace. This appears plain from Paul's writings; Rom. xi. 6, *And if of grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace; otherwise work is no more work.* If this passage does not state the most glaring opposition between works and grace, it is past a possibility to make a contrast. They; therefore, who attempt to join them, to the same end and for the same purpose, even though it might be under the most plausible pretence of securing the *interests of holiness*, are, under a fatal mistake, in the most essential points of the gospel, and as far from standing in the true grace of God, as the east is from being joined with the west. *For to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt,* Rom. iv. 4.

And here let it be carefully observed, that the grace of God stands in opposition, not only to those legal works, by which the Jews went about to establish their own righteousness, but also to *all works* whatever wrought by the creature. Whether they be works of the law, or works of the gospel; exercises of the heart, or actions of the life, done while we are in a state of nature, or after we are born of God, they are all, and every of them, *equally* set aside, as being either the cause, condition, qualification, or medium, either in the purpose, manifestation, or bestowment of grace; in any of its abounding blessings; in order that every *shadow* of glorying, should be for ever cut off from the creature, and God in Christ receive the *unrivalled* honor of salvation in all its parts.

Divine grace therefore is the *free favor*, the undeserved compassion of Jehovah, through Christ Jesus, to the *absolutely wretched*; and includes the bestowment of all spiritual and eternal blessings.—The properties of divine grace are, *sovereign, rich, and free*; that is, *sovereign*, as it bestows its favors *where* and on *whomsoever* it pleases;—*rich*, as being *exceeding abundant* in all manner of supplies, extended

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tended to the utmost necessities of the poor and wretched;—and *free*, because not upon the account of any inviting qualifications, not in rewarding him that willeth or ruineth, but, in all its bestowments, wearing the pleasing appearance of *reigning mercy*. In short, grace confers the greatest blessings and highest favors, upon the most undeserving amongst the sons of men, according to the *good pleasure* of the divine goodness.——The scriptures always preserve these ideas, whenever the term *grace* is mentioned.——Thus the *gospel* is called *the grace of God*, because it reveals the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, and opens up the eternal purposes of sovereign grace and abounding mercy in him. If the *new creature* be at any time designed by this term, it still preserves the same endearing signification. *For God who hath commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* 2 Cor. iv. 6. *Titus* iii. 4, 6. *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began:* 2 Tim. i. 9. If acts of liberality or a good conversation, 2 Cor. viii. 7, be called grace; it directly leads our thoughts from the effect to the cause, 2 Cor. ix.

I shall close this section with the words one had occasion to use when giving cautions against the counterfeit grace. “The doctrine of *free grace* being so illustrious in the scriptures as not to be spoken against; they (the Arminians) will talk as high of it in *general terms* as any other, and tell us what great pretensions their doctrine hath to magnify *grace*; and that they design nothing more than the honor of that: when indeed, it is *not grace*, but a contrary thing set up with that name; for follow the stream either upward or downward; and as it arises from, so it all runs into *advancement of self*.”

SECTION

SECTION II.

The Purpose of GRACE.

NOTHING is more capable of demonstration, if we take it for granted that the scriptures are the word of God, than that the *self moved* good pleasure of Jehovah's *eternal purpose*, is the grand original source of all spiritual and eternal blessings: according as it is written, *Who hath saved and called us—according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*—The choice of the Mediator's person, in whom men should be blessed, and his fore-ordination to be the beginning of the new-creation, was the effect of mere good pleasure, and sovereign favor. *I will give thee for a covenant to the people, is the language of pure grace.* In the eternal purpose CHRIST stands the first and chief elect. Hence the father calls him *Mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.* He is the first born among many brethren in the household of faith, the family of heaven; the center of Jehovah's delights amongst the sons of men. In him God is well pleased; and out of him, he is nothing but displeasure against sinners. Hence *The remnant according to the election of grace, are chosen in him;* and unless this had been the case, there could have been no salvation.—That Jehovah's good pleasure was the *only* cause, of a people being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of grace being treasured up *in him*, by the divine decree for the salvation and glorification of numberless sinners, is a *fact* which shines with the clearest lustre, and is demonstrated and confirmed in the oracles of unerring truth. Hence we read of *A remnant according to the election of grace—of Predestination to the adoption of children according to the good pleasure of his will, which he had purposed in himself, &c.* And it is an

qually plain from the same authority, that His original design in the appointment of Christ, &c. was *his own glory*,—the manifestation of his sovereignty, wisdom, justice, holiness, mercy, faithfulness, power, and truth.

But tho' this good pleasure of the divine goodness is so grand in its own nature,—so full of divine sovereignty—so consistent with all the divine perfections—so infinitely worthy of HIMSELF to make known, that he is represented as delighting in the same, before he gave birth to time, or existence to creatures, yet it is most disgustful to, and mortally hated by the sons of pride, who think no reproaches too odious to cast upon it ! But why is it so ? Why should man reply against God ? Why does the creature proceed so impiously, as to call the God that made him to his bar, and censure and condemn *his* conduct who has a sovereign right to do according to his own pleasure, in heaven and earth, without being subject to any one's inquiry into the reason of his procedure ?

The true cause of this ungodly opposition is, that vain man would fain have some ground of glorying *in himself* before God ; whereas the language of the bible is, *the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low : and the LORD ALONE shall be exalted.* It not only forbids creatures glorying in the divine presence ; but strips them of all their fancied importance, and leaves them destitute of the least pretence to, or ground of boasting. Hence the very sinews of human pride are cut : and every one that is saved, enters the kingdom of heaven upon the same footing as a *little child*.—But however this sublime truth is hated, traduced and rejected, by those who fancy themselves rich, and so stand in need of nothing ; it will ever prove salutary to those, who view themselves as poor and miserable ; because towards such it wears the most encouraging, friendly, smiling aspect : for if rightly understood, the doctrine of divine sovereignty opens a door of hope, presents an all-sufficient relief to those who
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are justly condemned, and on the very verge of despair.—The self-sufficient, like their prime leader, go about industriously to pervert this heavenly doctrine; for though, like him, they use scripture, and in general terms talk highly about the eternal purpose of grace, yet under that name they set up a thing, contrary in its nature to the *true grace of God*.—Such are they who make the *cause* of the divine choice to salvation and eternal life, to centre in some *foreseen* works, pious desires, repentance, &c.—But could we imagine that man appeared, in the foreknowledge of God, as pure and holy as the angels who sinned not; yet if that were the *cause*, or, in any sense the reason, that influenced Jehovah to chuse them, though we might discover *faithfulness* and *justice* in the Almighty, when accomplishing his designs, we directly lose sight of *sovereign grace*. And though the signification of the term *grace* be twisted and turned by false criticism, to blind the eyes of the weak and unstable; yet an authority higher than human, warrants us to say, that if any, or all of the abovementioned things be the *cause* of any being chosen to eternal life, *Grace is no more grace*. Yea we may go further, and yet keep within the bounds of revealed truth. The eternal purpose of grace was not the *effect* of Jehovah's foreknowledge even of the spotless obedience, and perfect atonement of Christ. HE is by no means the *cause* of everlasting love and the eternal purpose, but rather the *fruit and effect* thereof. Much less then would it comport with the scripture account of the eternal purpose, or the genuine signification of *grace*, to say, that foreseen works or any inward qualities whatever in the creature were the moving cause, or even the remotest medium of the divine choice.

Again; the supposition that any thing foreseen in the creature, influenced the divine choice, is opposed by that state which the word of God represents mankind universally to be in, and in which the divine

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prescience must eternally behold them, viz. a state of sin, in which they lay polluted as an unclean thing, and obnoxious to the divine wrath; which it would be blasphemy to suppose, could draw out the love of the holy God, so could not be any reason of the divine approbation or choice. But the holy Ghost, even the spirit of truth who cannot err, makes void the hypothesis I am opposing, when he tells us, that they who were *chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, and predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace; were dead in trespasses and sins and by nature the children of wrath even as others.* Eph. i, 4—6, chap. ii, 1—3. Thus he who searches the mind of God reports, and we know that his witness is true.

Further; it is contrary to the express declaration of the word, Rom. xi. 5, 6, where we are expressly taught, that the divine choice proceeds upon grace, in opposition to every notion of worthiness or desert whatever. We have not the liberty here, even of halving the matter, or adding the least grain of the one to the other, for even this cannot be done without destroying both. To say, therefore, that the divine choice is of grace, and yet to maintain that it has respect to works, under any form or notion that they can be conceived of, is to assert, in Paul's estimation, the most glaring contradiction that can possibly be thought of. I can compare it to nothing more fitly, than an attempt to prove that darkness is the *cause* of light.

Once more; it has been said that election is founded upon a foreknowledge of our *love*. But the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, so that naturally we have no love to God in us: nor can we have any love to God's true character, until the sovereign, preventing grace of God turn us from darkness to light; for till then, we are totally ignorant

norant of the divine beauty. Paul sets the matter in its true light, Eph. ii, 4, 5, *But God who is rich in mercy for HIS GREAT LOVE wherewith HE loved us, &c.* And another scripture saith, *Herein is love, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD but that HE LOVED US; And we love him BECAUSE HE FIRST loved us.* So that it would seem, if credit is to be given to God's word, that the notion of foreseen love in us being the *cause* or medium of God's love to us, is a mere human fabrication, and without the shadow of foundation in the scriptures.

Lastly; others who admit the eternal purpose, and deny either foreseen works or foreseen love to be the *cause* of it, nevertheless maintain, that it was formed upon the foreknowledge of our faith or believing. But the full force of this notion is invalidated by this single consideration, that faith comes as much of God's good pleasure and sovereign favor, as the eternal purpose itself. Divine faith is what no man naturally possesses; for we are all in unbelief. Faith is of the operation of God; the very verse which declares salvation to be of grace, shews that faith is not of ourselves, *it is the gift of God.* And the person who receives this precious favor, can no more account for its being given to him, in the behalf of Christ, to believe in his name, while others remain in unbelief, than he can tell whence the wind cometh, or whither it goeth. For however firmly a person may have believed, what he imagined was the gospel of Christ, when he truly knows, thro' divine teaching, what the gospel is, he will plainly discover that the Lord was found of him who sought not after him.

From this brief view of the eternal purpose of grace, it appears that divine sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and goodness, are united in the blessed decree of *him* whose council shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure; and tho' many have been more concerned about the creature's *liberty*, lest it should

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be infringed, than Jehovah's *sovereignty*, lest it should be limited, yet divine wisdom so directs the accomplishment of his purpose, that his chosen people are made willing in the day of his power ; at the time that all who eventually perish, do so with the utmost freedom of will : they chuse what their delight centers in ; they love darkness rather than light.

To conclude this section ; sovereignty is essential to DEITY. Sovereignty, directed by unerring wisdom, is the rule of *all* Jehovah's proceedings. The original *cause* of salvation, is the *self-moved purpose of divine grace* ; and the *only cause* of any sinner's damnation is his *own voluntary wickedness, and unprovoked rebellion against God.*



SECTION III.

The Manifestation of GRACE.

PAUL having spoken of the purpose of grace in Christ Jesus before the world began, tells us that it is *now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* And that, *Through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the Devil.*—Our attention is hereby led to the entrance of sin into the world. Sin is the cause of that death which God our Saviour came to abolish. Sin first originated in Satan : his sin was *pride*, which it has been thought, (from John viii, 44,) arose in his great mind from supposing it an indignity to *him*, that the human nature should be the medium of God's communion with his creatures, and so *he* left his own habitation. From Christ and his Apostles comparing those who are enemies to, and corrupters of the gospel, to the angels that fell,

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fell, and declaring, that those who apostatize, fall into the condemnation of the Devil; it seems not unlikely that this was the case. However that may be, we are at no uncertainty when the first manifestation of sovereign grace was made to man; and this more directly claims our attention.

The word informs us, that *man* was made lord of this lower creation, yet himself framed to live in absolute dependance on his maker, as the author and giver of all things, and the sovereign of life and death; in the enjoyment of whose favor he was completely happy, and had assurance that he should remain so, while his dependance upon, and obedience to the word of his Sovereign, was preserved inviolable. His natural knowledge of God then must give him comfort, while conscious of having done the things that were well pleasing in his sight. He did not stand in need of any different revelation of God, to complete that happiness which he was framed to enjoy; so that no intimation was, or consistently could be given him, in his state of innocence, of the purpose of grace. But when, thro' affecting *independence*, he became a *transgressor*, and so deserving of the threatened death;—when *defiled*, and so incapable of communion with God;—when nothing but awful, aggravated guilt flew in his face,—nothing but shame, terror, and almost despair filled and harassed his conscience;—when, in consequence of this, his former knowledge of God heightened, instead of allaying the storm within, so that nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment was before him;—when emptiness, vanity, confusion, disorder, and wrath was brought upon the whole creation;—when nothing from without Jehovah could move him, to suspend the execution of the threatening, far less be a motive to manifest his goodness;—*then* was the time that infinite wisdom chose, for *grace*, in its rich aboundings, to make its welcome appearance; that its true nature and design might appear,

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pear, and that it might be seen upon the earth, that sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and mercy were in the purpose of grace perfectly united. *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,* were the blessed words that opened the grand mystery which had been hid with God.—By this glorious system of grace the honor of the divine government—the wisdom of God in the permission of sin—the destruction of satan's kingdom—the abolishment of death—the establishment of the divine law—and the eternal salvation of the elect are infallibly secured.

The way Jehovah has been pleased to make known his designs of grace in its various stages, is declared by the apostle Paul, Heb i. 1. *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners speak in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son—who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.*—Hence we see, that though there has been but one way of salvation since the fall, and that according to the purpose of God in Christ, yet the manifestation of it was given at sundry times, and in divers manners.—I shall not attempt here, to trace at large, the various openings of the mystery of grace, previous to the appearance of God our Saviour, but only observe, that Paul ranks them under the general name of the *old covenant*; by which I understand that temporary dispensation, which God gave to the fathers, which under the veil of types, &c. represented the blessings of the divine purpose, and were patterns of heavenly things, to remain in use until the SEED should come. Some are inclined to think the *old covenant* began, when the Lord took Israel by the hand, and led them forth out of Egypt; but it is plain from scripture, that it began immediately after the fall, for it appears from Gen iii. 21, and Chap. iv. 4, that sacrifices were made, which, without doubt, were intended

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to set forth the great atonement, through faith in which Abel's sacrifice was accepted, Heb. xi. 4. Not to say any thing particularly about Noah, and the manifestation of grace to him under certain signs, such as the *Ark*, the *Rainbow*, &c. it may be observed, that the nature of this covenant was more fully revealed to Abraham, and the blessings of grace which it represented, more clearly manifested to him, Gen. xii. 3. Gen. xxii. 6—19, John viii. 56, Gal. iii. 8, the Apostle Paul also confirms this thought, Heb. ix. 15. *And for this cause he is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called, might receive the promise of eternal inheritance,* see v. 26. The one atoning sacrifice of Christ extended itself to the transgression of Adam, and to all their transgressions, who believed in the promised seed to the time that the sacrifice was made at Calvary, with as much virtue as it does to those who thro' grace believe in him now, as having finished his work, and received the great reward thereof. The old covenant therefore comprehends all ages, from Adam to the time that it waxed old and vanished away; tho' without doubt, under the ministry of Moses the former signs were renewed, greatly augmented, and formed into a complete system of ceremonial worship. The sacrifices in general—the cities of refuge—the year of jubilee—the land of Canaan—the kings, prophets, and priests in Israel—the Temple, its utensils, and every part of the worship thereof (of which things we cannot now speak particularly) were all shadows of good things to come; but after having answered their end decayed, waxed old and then vanished away. But I have chiefly to speak of grace and truth as it came by Jesus Christ. And indeed it is only in reference to this that we can behold grace manifested under the old covenant, for we are not to imagine that any thing pertaining thereunto could take away sin; nor yet

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yet that the privileges of the temporary covenant gave any right to that of the new and everlasting, *The promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith: for if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void and the promise (that all nations of the earth should be blessed in Christ) made of none effect.*

GOD—hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son. And indeed only the Son could make known the mystery which lay hid with GOD; for no man hath seen God at any time;—the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. It will not be amiss here, to take some notice of the person of the Son, by whom the eternal purpose is made manifest. He is frequently stiled *the Son of man*, which points out that he is properly a man; and when this title is given him in the new testament, it leads us to think of him as a creature naturally inferior to the angels; and not a creature existing before any other creatures were made, as some most absurdly suppose, Heb ii, 14. Yet under this title we are not to suppose him begotten of man; otherwise he could not have been called that HOLY THING. Concerning this important matter, the word of God thus teaches, *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son—and Mary said unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.* By the Holy Ghost coming upon the virgin, &c. our attention is led to what is written in the Psalms concerning him. *A body hast thou prepared me.* This body was set apart for Jehovah in the highest degree; so that God was manifested in the flesh: for though Jesus was made a little lower than the angels,
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for the suffering of death ; yet he has a name above every name, at the mention of which all the angels of God worship him. The prophet foretold, that he who should make his appearance upon the earth, in the fulness of time, was in fact no less a person than *The mighty God ! the everlasting Father !—the Lord God !—the God of the whole earth, &c !*—Isa. ix, 6, chap. xl, 10, chap. liv. 5. John also tells us, that the word that was in the beginning with God—*was God* ; so that when *Immanuel* made his appearance, he scrupled not to say, *I am the Son of God* ; by which he meant the same as when he said *I and my father are one. The father is in me and I in him.* In this sense the Jews understood him, and counted what he said blasphemy, for which they put him to death : and in the resurrection of Christ we see the father, who was appealed to on both sides, interposing and deciding the controversy ; by which he cleared Jesus from the charge of blasphemy when he *made himself God.* Immanuel then is a true and perfect image of the invisible God, the brightness of the father's glory, and the express image of his person. As the Christ of God, it hath pleased the father that in him all fulness should dwell, and those who knew him in the days of his flesh, beheld him *full of grace and truth,* John i, 14. In agreement with this we are told, that *the grace of God was upon him, and grace is poured into his lips.* Moses speaking of him as the great prophet who should reveal the father's grace, says, *him shall ye hear* ; and that he was well qualified to open the grand mystery, will appear if we collect what has been already hinted of him. He is truly and properly man, and so can hold converse with us, without his terrors making us afraid. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and so a fit person for Jehovah to enter into covenant with, and communicate his mind unto. He is above all, God blessed for evermore, and so possessed of all the treasures of wisdom
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and knowledge ; and being all this in *unity of person*, he could stand between God and man—he would also be at full liberty to benefit whomsoever he chose, by his work, inasmuch as he is the independent God, and as such not bound in obedience to any. And of course, all that he did or spoke must be filled with infinite dignity and virtue.

Having seen that Christ is the only person in earth or heaven, worthy to open the divine purpose, and accomplish the same, let us see wherein sovereign grace appears in the manifestation of God our Saviour.—God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and this unspeakable gift is the proper expression of that love, with which God loved his people before the world began, for that love being infinite, the full expression of it could not have been declared, but by a gift of infinite worth, so that unless Jesus were an infinite person, the gift would not have been expressive of the abundant grace; but the gift of Christ is equal to the father's superlative love: yet how great the grace and the expression of it are, no finite being can tell: we can only say God *so* loved the world! &c. and herein is love! yet since it is *so* manifested, as that we may, in part, perceive it, let us take a view thereof, in the mirror of truth. Jehovah gave his son; his only son, his well-beloved son—gave him for a covenant to a people deserving his wrath—gave him up to the sword of justice in their place—and, what is most astonishing, himself commanded that sword to delay no longer, but awake and strike the awful blow! yea, it even pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief! whether the divine sovereignty, justice, or grace, shone most glorious in this awful transaction, who can tell? Consider further, that the persons on whom this infinite blessing was bestowed, were enemies to God by wicked works,—rebels against the divine Majesty,—persons who had wickedly trampled upon his authority—at awful enmity in their hearts against

against his government—universally defiled with sin, and of consequence infinitely odious to divine purity—a *mass of uncleanness*. What shall we say to these things? Was God under any obligation to manifest such abundant kindness? Far otherwise: his law which man broke was holy, so that the wisdom, holiness, faithfulness, and honor of God, yea, all his adorable perfections, stood engaged to punish the transgressor with destruction. Nothing therefore but pure sovereignty and free grace could be the moving cause of such compassion. This Paul had an eye to when he said, *But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even while we were dead in sins, &c.* How infinitely above the utmost extent of what is called mercy among men, does the divine good pleasure rise!—Again, as the riches of grace appear in the father's unspeakable gift, and considering the objects upon whom its favors are conferred, to also in the astonishing humiliation of the Son of God. *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* Unparalleled condescension this! That *he* who inhabited the praises of eternity—*he* who spake, and the universe rose into being—*he* who fills the sun with light, preserves the course of nature, stretches out his hand and fills all living with food—*he* who appeared in tremendous glory at Sinai, and shall shortly ascend his great white throne to judgment—that *he* should become an infant of days—*he* brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger, where oxen fed—should take the form of a servant,—suffer hunger, thirst, and fatigue,—*be* without a place to lay his head,

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head,—and subject himself to cruel mockings, buffetings, and shameful spitting, and to complete the strange scene, voluntarily yield up himself to his enemies—deny himself of his father's smiles, which he valued more than life—make his soul a sacrifice for sin, and expire under the wrath of a sin-avenging God!—*What things are these!*—Does any thing but mere good pleasure, grace altogether liberal and unmerited appear throughout the whole?

Let us now consider the character that Jesus sustained in his state of humiliation, and the benefits resulting to his people from his work.—The important office which the Son of God sustained was that of a SURETY, Heb. vii. 22. In order to this he was made under the law, and set by the Sovereign of heaven in the law room and place of his people; to fulfil all righteousness in their behalf, and to satisfy justice in its utmost demands for their transgressions, *that God might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* The prophet Daniel very accurately states the Surety's work in the following words, *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon the holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.* That our sins were imputed to the surety; that Jesus was substituted to be the sin-bearing and sin-atonement lamb, appears from such declarations as follow: *The Lord hath laid ON HIM the iniquity of US ALL. HE was made sin FOR US Himself bare OUR SINS in his own body on the tree. Through the eternal spirit he offered himself without spot unto God, and thereby put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* Thus *He poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sins of MANY, and made intercession FOR the transgressors.* But though our divine Substitute placed himself in the lowest state of human wretchedness, and expired under the wrath of God; though he made his grave with the wicked, and with

with the rich in his death; yet the third day he rose again according to the scriptures; whereby it was fully demonstrated, that the work which he had declared *finished*, when he gave up the Ghost, was acceptable and well pleasing to God, was all-sufficient to deliver his people from death and the curse,—that he, as our surety, was freed from those sins which had been charged upon him, having made full atonement for them,—being justified in the sight of the holy law,—declared to be the son of God with power, and as the reward of his obedience and sufferings, crowned with glory, as it is written, *Thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.*

It is generally allowed that Christ magnified the law and made it honorable, and so fulfilled all righteousness; and it is as plain that his obedience to the law, was done in his people's room, or as their Surety. If this be not true, it will be hard to find a tolerable gloss to put upon that scripture, which informs us, that *By the obedience of one many are made righteous.* But this momentous truth does not go a begging for its evidence, nor does it rest simply upon one passage of holy writ, but is intermingled with the whole of revelation. Paul, in describing *The Righteousness of faith*, shows, that it is imputed for righteousness to every one that believeth. *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*, Rom. x. 4. *He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*, II. Cor. v. 21, see also Rom. iii. 21—26, Chap. iv. 3—6, 22—25. Unless this be admitted, there can appear no propriety, beauty, nor glory in that admirable name which the Surety bears, and which is the glory of his church, viz. THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, Jer. xxiii. 6. And their claim would be void, who in the triumphs of faith, say, IN THE LORD HAVE I RIGHTEOUSNESS and strength.—If this sacred truth was built upon

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no better foundation, than the highest witness of men, we might fear the wrath of men against it ; but it rests upon a basis infinitely more secure, than even earth's foundations ; for, *Their righteousness is of me* SAITH THE LORD.

Thus we have seen that the incarnation, obedience, sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ, and the glory that followed, together with the declared end thereof, is the eternal purpose of grace unfolded, *even the mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.* Many of the works of men are beautiful ; all the divine works are glorious ; but the Saviour's works of obedience and suffering exceed in glory. Here the ETERNAL ceases, as it were, to be invisible : the veil is rent, and the most holy place thrown wide open ; for in the cross of Christ the brightest exhibition is made, of every divine perfection ; the sovereignty and riches of divine mercy and grace—the glory of the divine Justice, or the infinite opposition of the Deity to sin ; in a word, infinite wisdom, veracity, and power, with every other glorious attribute, unite in honoring the holy law, setting forth the evil of sin, destroying the works of Satan and completely saving the chosen of God.



SECTION IV.

The WORD of GRACE ; or GRACE in its publication.

NOTHING can be more grand, and becoming the sovereign of heaven, than that awful view of eternal power given us in the following words, **LET THERE BE LIGHT—AND THERE WAS LIGHT !** Thus by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the spirit of his mouth ;

mouth; for he spake and it was—he commanded, and it stood fast. This *divine person*, who spoke all things into existence, and who upholds all things by his power, is called THE WORD OF GOD, Rev. xix. 13, and in reference to the purpose of grace and its publication, he is called a PROPHET, Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19. The forerunner of this great prophet testifies, that *He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God*; and the faithful and true witness himself declares, *The words which ye hear of me are not mine, but the father's that sent me; he gave me commandment what I should speak*. And addressing the father he says, *I have given them* (his apostles) *the words which thou gavest me*. Now the scriptures of truth are the words of this great prophet; for though but a small part of them were spoken by him, while he tabernacled upon earth; yet it was by his Spirit that holy men of old were inspired to write, 1 Peter i. 11. 2 Peter i. 21. And the same blessed spirit was, after Christ's ascension, made to rest upon his apostles, under whose inspiration they spake *none other things, than Moses and the prophets did say should come*. The scriptures then being given by inspiration of God, are a perfect record of his mind, and the only unerring guide to the knowledge of him the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.—The first pattern of all grace and truth is Jehovah. Christ is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person: and the love, truth and grace of the father being expressed in him, is from him, by his spirit, communicated to the word, which on this account is called *The revelation of Jesus Christ*. So that it is a vain thing to pretend to, or expect any other knowledge of Grace, than what the word of truth publishes. Hence it is called *the word of grace—the gospel of grace—the truth*, &c. and all that are of the truth hear Christ's voice. Such will not be surprized to see these heavenly oracles perverted; it will not appear a strange thing to them, to behold some turn the grace of God

into lasciviousness—others, with cunning craftiness, lying in wait to deceive—others, changing the truth of God into a lie—and many, following their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of ;—they rather receive hereby, a notable confirmation of the truth of the scriptures, which foretold, that many would deny Christ, under a profession of his name.

I shall here therefore give a brief view of some systems, out of many, which, while they pretend to have their foundations in the word of God, answer no other end than to eclipse and pervert the truth as it is in Jesus ; and so, to decoy and ruin precious souls : and then attempt to state the true nature, glory, sufficiency and freeness, of the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

It might be observed by the way, that the variety of doctrines and the diversity of sentiments, prevailing in the professing world, are by no means to be considered as arising from any different *end*, that their inventors and propagators have in view ; but from the different *ways* in which they hope to attain the one common end. Nothing less than happiness, even everlasting happiness, is the grand end proposed ; and every one is ready to think his own scheme, the nearest and most eligible way thereunto. Those among professing Christians, who have the highest reputation for virtue, benevolence, candor, and decorum, seek to obtain the favor of the most high, by their own obedience ; and it must be acknowledged, that this plan claims the preference of any modern scheme, which the wisdom of man has framed ; for such have the assurance of the one law-giver for their security, that if they are found *perfectly good*, or in his sight *do well*, they shall be rewarded. Man was at the first framed to live, and enjoy his Maker's favor in this way ; nor is there any knowledge, that we have naturally, that can point out a better. We find many very earnest in
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the pursuit of eternal life in this way, seeking righteousness *as it were* by the deeds of the law; not that it should be thought they have nothing to do with the gospel; for, in general, that is esteemed as the best directory to obey the law. Nor are we to imagine, that every notion of grace is excluded from this system, for looking upon the progress of nature, as they imagine, under divine assistance, they can see great cause to say *God I thank thee that I am not as other men*: and though they do not come up to the full requirements of the law, even in their own sense of it, yet they put their many acts of piety, charity, benevolence, heavenly-mindedness, &c. in the opposite scale and, with pleasing admiration, fancy they see the balance turn in their favor. And as to their short-comings, occasioned by human frailty, the streaming sorrows of the heart-bleeding penitent are thought sufficient; to wash away the impurity thereof. Now, to animate the votaries of this way, the rewards of virtue in this present life, but more especially in the life to come, are proposed to their consideration. "To be conscious of that cloudless serenity within, which proceeds from *passions subdued*, under the superior authority of reason and religion; to feast upon the *uninterrupted* joys, which this vain world can neither give nor take away; to bless and be blessed: to love and be loved; to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; to serve him whose service is the glory of those who sit enthroned in heaven, and to have neither *thought* nor *wish*, which would not do us honor, if published before the universe—What sense of *dignity*, what *self-enjoyment* must this consciousness yield! And if such enjoyments are the rewards of virtue here, what, then, must be the undisturbed fruition of that state which the present weakness of the human understanding cannot adequately conceive of," &c. Such is the doctrine, and such the stimulation to virtue, among some who profess to derive their religion from the Bible. But

what if it should appear, from that very book, that every son and daughter of Adam is under a law, which requires *sinless perfection*, on pain of eternal death—that the least transgression is infinitely heinous—and that no partial obedience, however sincere, can recover the divine favor when once lost? And what if it should appear, from the express words of the great Lawgiver, that the whole world is guilty before him? Then surely it will follow, that this doctrine is corrupt, the hope founded upon it delusive,—and that, while its votaries are pleasing themselves with the thoughts of being in the way to heaven; they are in fact going down to hell, with a lie in their right hand. And that this is the case, plainly appears from Gal. iii. 10. Luke x. 27. Mat. v. 22, 28; whence it is evident, that such is the nature of that law, which every intelligent creature is under infinite obligations to obey, that it extends to the inmost thoughts of the heart, and condemns the rising of anger, as *murder*, and the secret motions of uncleanness, as *adultery*. If it be denied by any, that every soul of man, is under obligations to keep the whole law, let the following thoughts be impartially weighed. If all are not under the law naturally; then the rewards of obedience and the threatnings of disobedience could not be *universal*. But the whole world is become guilty before God; and so are liable to the threatened curse. Rom. iii. 19. chap. ii. 8, 9. Gal. iii. 10; therefore all men are naturally under the law. And however it might shock the boasted benevolence of some, to think of God destroying the soul and body of any of his creatures in hell; yet that book, from whence they profess to have gathered their creed, informs us, that the law, even as the ministration of death, is *glorious*. To urge that the remorse of the transgressor, or any degree of penitence would bind or influence Jehovah to pardon him, would be an unworthy reflection upon the holy law, and the equity of the divine government;

vernment; and would involve nothing less than an insinuation, that Christ died in vain, and that the doctrine of his cross is *foolishness*. But so far is *remorse* or *penitence* from averting the curse, or procuring pardon, or the highest human virtue, from balancing the least transgression, that a single grain of sand would do more towards overbalancing the world. If sin be an infinite evil (and consistently to deny it we must give up the whole of revelation) then "the streaming sorrows of the heart-bleeding penitent," added to thousands of sacrificed rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil, will be of no avail to atone for it. Now that sin is an infinite evil, might be fairly demonstrated from—the *object* against whom it is committed—the malignant stain of it, which, unless atoned for, will eternally remain—the loss of an infinite portion in God being its demerits, and the eternal extent of that loss. Unless therefore an atonement of infinite worth be found out, the wrath of God must abide on the soul that sinneth; for this (however uncharitable it may appear in their view whom it affects) is the decision of that law, by which we are to judge ourselves and to be judged.

But the above system is found fault with and exploded by others who yet maintain "That though Paul says where sin hath abounded, grace hath also superabounded; it does not therefore follow, that before one is by grace made acceptable, he may not through divine assistance prepare himself, by works morally good for the divine favor"—"I agree, says one, with those, who ascribe *a little* to free will, but *very much* to grace." Now by the works hinted at here, we are to understand either sincere obedience to the law, or fulfilling the conditions of faith and repentance, or else complying with the terms of peace, to which we are told the blessings of the gospel belong, and which may be produced by nature, assisted by common grace. If any fixed meaning
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can be given to this jargon, it is something like the following, viz. that God will give all desirable assistance to the well-disposed ; and if we do but what we can, or at least make but one step towards our reconciliation with him, he will give us his Spirit to help us to proceed. The same sentiment has been given us in various other forms of speech, and by some with a great show of sound doctrine ;—we have been told that “ Whosoever sincerely endeavors to please God, may rest perfectly assured, that God has no displeasure against him ; for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.” At other times the word of encouragement is given to the weak and feeble, tho’ well-disposed, in this form, “ In the usual methods of grace, evil habits are mastered by degrees—and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength, and man comes to a confirmed state of goodness—but yet this ought not to discourage us ; for so soon as WE have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavors will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us ; and if we pursue our advantage, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hand.” When our first beginnings to be better take the notion of sincere repentance, then we have the following instructions, “ If you hate your former ways, which were not good, and sincerely repent of them and with mourning hearts, and weeping eyes approach to God, for the pardon of sin : as that law which is the unchanging standard of right requires man should forgive his enemies, upon their repenting and asking pardon ; much more will the divine author of that law. To the *humble penitent* every encouragement is given.” But when the beginning of any good in us, is termed *acting faith upon Christ*, then the address runs thus, “ If ever the spirit of God graciously influence your souls, ye will become thoroughly sensible of your absolute

absolute inability" (here follows the proof of this) "and yet enter upon a vigorous use of means. Ye will do for yourselves as if ye were to do *all*; and yet overlook all ye do" (which by the way will be the greatest part of the work) "as if ye had done *nothing*. Will ye do *nothing* for yourselves, because ye cannot do *all*? Lay down no such impious conclusions against your own soul. Do what you *can*, and it may be, while ye are doing what ye *can* for yourselves, God will do for you what ye *cannot*." And in order to remove every discouragement, from the thought that the natural man cannot please God, it is added "Let us believe as we can, in obedience to God's command,—and while we are doing so, although the act be at the beginning but NATURAL, yet in the very act, promised and purchased grace strikes in, and turns it into a supernatural act of believing." Thus, at length, it is found out how they that are in the flesh might please God! This the apostle Paul had not attained to, Rom. viii. 8. 'To the same amount is the following address, "So soon as the sinner was disposed to accept, the saviour was willing to bestow free and full redemption; and the very first sigh that comes from an awakened heart pierces the ears of our gracious God—the Psalmist says, he sent water into the wilderness to change its nature; that is, he sent his grace into our hearts to change their nature, to shew them their dead and barren state, to make them sensible of it, distressed under it, and then to cry to him for deliverance, and when his grace has thus far disposed the heart aright, and it can pray for more grace; then will our Lord enrich it with abundant streams; for he is always disposed to give, in the treasure we are disposed to receive."

These are but a few specimens, out of a many that might be collected, to shew the use men have made of the gospel, in what sense they understand it, and how they expect to be saved by it. But if it be indeed

dead true, as most of the above systems would insinuate, that man is a ruined creature, and so in a forlorn, helpless condition; it does not appear from either of these schemes, that there is any thing like *Glad tidings of great joy*, to such an one; for however much the better disposed sort of people may be encouraged thereby, they contain no hope or encouragement for the simply guilty; for nothing can be gospel to such, but that which presents a sufficient ground of hope to them, while in the divine sight, and in their own conscience, they stand justly condemned as transgressors of the law. This the gospel of the grace of God does: and therefore every scheme of religion that teaches men to *do* any thing, or even to wait to have any thing done, to encourage their hope in God; is quite different in its nature and design, to the gospel of Christ, and in fact encourages man's natural disaffection to God, even while it leads him to fancy that he is at peace with him. The gospel does not teach us to *do* any thing, though it be varnished over with the most evangelical names, but to live by what is already *finished*, 1 John, iv. 9.—It is, whether men perceive it or no, glad tidings of great joy to ALL people; and so must be free from what are called *the terms of the gospel*; for however small these *terms* are sometimes said to be, when they come to be explained, they show that by far the greater part of the work of salvation, is left for the sinner to perform. The gospel is in fact nothing more than a report of the *grace* and truth that came by Jesus Christ. There are various summaries given of it in the scriptures, such as, “He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.”—“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”—“He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”—“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,” and “God commendeth his love towards

towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us:" yea "Herein perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us," and "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief among them;"—"Wherefore he is able to save them to the **UTTERMOST** that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." so then it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." "For now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God; which is by faith of Jesus Christ, *unto all and upon all them that believe*, for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." The word that conveys this blessed righteousness "Is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; for the scripture saith, **WHOEVER** believeth on him shall not be ashamed—so then faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God."

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The glorious truths set forth in these words, of scripture are 1st, That the work of Christ finished upon the cross, does *in itself* contain every requisite for the justification of those who are ungodly and without strength ;—that God appears just in justifying such through the work of his son ;—and that, therefore, the Redeemer's work is an all-sufficient ground of present peace to the guilty conscience, and of joy to the most disconsolate soul, without taking in any other consideration whatever. 2dly, That salvation, through the finished work of the divine Surety, is bestowed in the most sovereign, free, and unconditional manner, to sinners without any distinction of character, nation, name or degree, to sinners *as such* destitute of every qualification or recommendation whatever. Such are the persons, and such the deplorable circumstances of those, whom the gospel is designed to relieve and save ! 3dly, That this gospel of the Kingdom is brought near to the guilty, and that the faithfulness of God, in the free promise of life in Christ Jesus to sinners believing in him, is the *only* encouragement that the lost and helpless have to hope in divine mercy ; and that to believe through any other medium, is to frustrate the true grace of God.

First ; That Christ obeyed and suffered in the room of his people, has been before shown to be a scripture doctrine. We have seen that he placed himself in the lowest state of human wretchedness, even under the curse of God ; beneath the full weight of which he expired. Now had the Lord Jesus been confined a prisoner by the bars of death ; it would have been fully demonstrated, that his work was not sufficient to bring salvation, to persons in the circumstances under which he died, and therefore we are taught to look upon his *resurrection*, as the grand, central evidence of the sufficiency of his work : of which fact the Lord therefore has been pleased to give ample evidence, both human and divine.

vine.—The old Testament foretold it—the new Testament confirms the glorious truth ;—the Spirit, whom Christ promised, as the consequence of his resurrection and ascension, testifies of it, in the miracles which the apostles wrought, and the happy effects which the gospel had amongst the nations of the earth ; for though the gates of hell were set in opposition to it, the kings of the earth and all human power united against it, and a fortress still more invulnerable in the hearts of sinners ; yet such was the almighty power attending it, that it bore down all opposition and proved itself mighty to save. If to all this be added the testimony of them whose interest it was to conceal it, it must appear that no fact can be supported by stronger evidence ; and the truth of the resurrection of Christ being established, the sufficiency of his work to save the guilty, is confirmed. It is acknowledged, that according to the tenor of the law, which saith, *the man that doeth these things shall live by them*, Christ merited life for himself only ; but then, by his being placed under the law by sovereign grace, that according to the eternal purpose men might be blessed in him ; God, by whose act of sovereignty he was appointed Mediator, in very faithfulness imputes his obedience and atonement to every one that believes, whereby they are made the righteousness of God in him.

The belief of this truth is the first and only thing that gives peace to a guilty conscience ; for as the only reason God assigns, why any should be delivered from going down to the pit is, *I have found a ransom* ; so this is the only reason of that *good hope* that comes through grace. When a guilty sinner understands that it is the voice of God that addresses his conscience, informing him that righteousness is imputed without works ; he believes, ceases from his own works, and enters into rest by virtue of what he believes, concerning *Christ's being delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification*.

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Again : that good news which the gospel brings is, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, as such. Unless this be true, the scriptures contain no tidings of great joy to *all people* : nay, unless this be an established fact, there is no just ground upon which any of the human race can approach to God ; nor can any soul receive the least benefit by the work of Christ. Nature will teach us, and the law of Moses will confirm it, that if we do well we shall be accepted. But this cannot be glad tidings to those who are conscious of being the unhappy subjects of every evil inclination, and of having been to every good work reprobate. But happy for such sons and daughters of wretchedness, that the gospel is a pure stream of *grace*, flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. Far from being clogged with those manifold qualifications and prerequisites, which the sons of pride would make a kind of stepping-stone to the salvation of Jesus ; the heavenly publication of grace does not lead poor sinners to look for the beginning of something for the better in themselves, under any notion whatever, previous to faith on the Son of God ; but teaches them, even while destitute of every sign, work, or evidence, except what confirms their misery, to hope in the *bleeding sacrifice*. It reveals and establishes an important, comfortable, precious, undeniable truth ; and leads the most guilty to take their *first beginnings* of hope, peace, and comfort from *it alone*. Thus the genuine gospel passes by, and totally disregards all those fine distinctions, which the pride of men prompts them to make, as so many cyphers ; and in the most sovereign manner bestows, the richest favors on the most unworthy among men. Every other scheme, but the gospel, leads men, either directly, or indirectly, to take the beginnings of their hope from their sincere obedience, penitential tears, deep humiliations, watchfulness, earnest desires, holy breathings, repentances, faith, advancements in holiness, &c. If
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it be admitted that **SOMETHING** is requisite to appear in the soul, that is favorable, and whereby we become, in some measure, different from the ungodly and profane, this fatal **SOMETHING**, whether we are aspiring after it, waiting for it, or in the supposed possession of it, is that awful instrument by which the God of this world blinds the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, should shine into their hearts, and is a grand reason why the gospel is foolishness to some, and a stumbling block to others; in short, it is the true cause of all disaffection to the gospel.—The gospel of grace, founded in the sincerity and faithfulness of Jehovah, making known the sufficient righteousness, and perfect atonement of Christ, as the sovereign cure provided of God for sinners, may very fitly (and with the strictest propriety) be called the **ONE THING NEEDFUL**. This in the word of faith is brought near to us, Rom. x. 6—10. is directed to the attention of sinners of all sorts; to such as possess nothing but what is loathsome and disgusting; to persons whose character is fitly set forth, Luke xiv. 21. The poor, and the maimed; the halt and the blind; and shows that as mankind are in an equal state of reprobation by nature, the most zealous devotee is as far off from God as the most profane. In fine, it considers the whole human race as having turned their backs on God; and so the word of faith is a voice behind them, calling them in the most benevolent language to return, at the same time presenting a sufficient encouragement thereto. *Hearken unto me ye stout hearted and far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry—Hear and your souls shall live—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall be saved.*

It has pleased the Lord also to leave on record many **PATTERNS** of his grace, all of which import, that it is divinely sovereign, unboundedly rich, and infinitely free. And we are moreover informed,

that those examples of Jehovah's long-suffering and mercy, were recorded to this end, *that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace through Christ Jesus.* Thus it appears that the eternal purpose of Grace, manifested by the appearance of God our Saviour, and published in the word of faith, is the only encouragement that the wretched have to hope in Jehovah's mercy; so that hope, peace, or comfort taken from any source aside from, or in conjunction with this abundant Grace, is delusive, and must, in the end make ashamed.

I shall conclude this Section with the words of an author, who writes with becoming reverence for the true grace of God, and like one who has tasted its sweetness, and knows its value. "The genuine gospel will always appear an insult on the taste of the public. Wherever it comes, if it be not received, it awakens disgust and provokes abhorrence. Nor can it be otherwise. For its principal design is, to mortify the pride of man, and display the glory of grace; to throw all human excellence down to the dust, and to elevate, even to thrones of glory, the needy and wretched; to show that those things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination in the sight of God, and that he who is despised of men and abhorred by the nations, is Jehovah's eternal delight.—The ancient gospel is an unceremonious thing. It pays no respect to the academic, because of his profound learning; nor to the moralist, on account of his upright conduct. It has not the least regard to the courtier, because of his pompous honors; nor to the devotee, for the sake of his zeal or his righteousness. No: the potent prince and the abject slave; the wise philosopher and the ignorant rustic; the virtuous lady and the infamous prostitute, stand on the same level in its comprehensive view.—Its business is only with the *worthless and miserable*, whoever they be. If these be relieved, its end is gained. If these be made hap-

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py, its author is glorified, whatever may become of the rest. Towards these it constantly wears the most friendly aspect, and rejoices to do them good. But the self-sufficient of every rank, are treated by it with the utmost reserve, and beheld with a steady contempt.—He (the convinced sinner) wants to find himself some way *distinguished*, as a proper object of mercy, by holy tempers and sanctified affections. This is a bar to his comfort: this is his grand embarrassment. In other words, he is ready to fear, that he is not *sufficiently humbled* under a sense of his sins; that he has not a *suitable abhorrence* of them; or that he has not those *servant breathings* after Christ and holiness, which he ought to have, before he can be warranted to look for salvation with a well-grounded hope of success.—But the spirit of truth shows that there is *no* good qualities to be obtained; *no* righteous acts to be performed—that we must come to Jesus under that character by which he calls us. But it is evident, he calls us by the name of *sinners*. As sinners, therefore, *miserable, ruined* sinners, we must come to him for life and salvation.—It was wrought for the *sinner*; it was designed for the *sinner*; and is bestowed, freely bestowed on the *wilest* of sinners. It is not matter of bargain or the subject of sale; it is not proposed on, I know not what *conditions*; as the performing some arduous course of duties, or the attaining some notable qualifications; but it is a *free gift*. Grace, as a sovereign, is exalted to confer it; and grace we know, deals only with the *unworthy*. As a gift it is imparted; as a gift, therefore, it must be received; and as for an absolute free gift, the possessor of it ought to be thankful.—From these considerations we may with confidence affirm, that the *mere* sinner, the *obnoxious* wretch; he who feels him self in a perishing condition, and is conscious that he deserves no favor; has the strongest encouragement given him to rely on it, as *sufficient* for his justification and *free* for his use.” †

† See Booth's Reign of Grace, p. 3—9. 124—130. 416.

SECTION V.

The Nature, and Manner of the Operation, of the Spirit of GRACE.

NOTHING is more generally mistaken, though nothing more important to be known and well understood, than the nature and manner of the operation of the Spirit of grace. Many indeed have gone so far in profaneness, as to deny, flatly and openly to deny, that there are now afforded to mankind any divine and supernatural influences; and level the blackest charges against those who maintain the importance and necessity of this heavenly doctrine. It must be acknowledged, that too much ground has been given for a denial of divine influences by those enemies of the truth, who, professing themselves advocates for the doctrine, have run into the most profane enthusiasms, and the vilest jargon. In this Section, therefore, an attempt will be made to point out the absurdity of the former, to expose the enthusiasm and profaneness of the latter, and to set forth the scripture account of this important doctrine.

We have nothing to do here with those men of *wit* who not only sneer at the work of the Holy Spirit, but also disregard every thing that wears the stamp of holiness: we rather address ourselves to those who, while they profess an uncommon attachment to the scriptures, and the one way of salvation by Jesus Christ, in fact, rank themselves among those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. Those who presuming they can produce a few passages of scripture (without regard to their connection) to show that the terms *word* and *spirit* are synonymous, fancy they have made a vast improvement in the scheme of Christianity; and so, with contemptuous sneer, pour ridicule upon all who acknowledge the divine sovereignty, and maintain

tain the indispensable necessity of the operation of the Spirit of grace, to give a true understanding of the word.

Their notion upon this subject is, that the word itself is a divine power, granted for us to believe by: and that there is no supernatural agency necessary to go forth in the word, either for our instruction, edification, consolation, or establishment; but it is *our adhering* to the written word. When persons of this sentiment condescend to explain themselves, we find that they look upon the scripture as one would a common history, and maintain that all who understand the use of words, may attain to the true knowledge of the bible; and that it is as foolish to talk of the necessity of the supernatural agency of the divine Spirit, to lead us into the truth, as to talk of waiting for his instruction when reading the history of England. Upon this plan it would seem that the more wise and learned, they who are the most skilful in the knowledge of words, stand the fairest chance to enter into life, contrary to that authority which informs us, that *Not many wise men after the flesh are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, &c.* 1 Cor. i, 19, &c.—If it be asked, why one receives the word and not another? Why do the most illiterate receive it, while the wise and learned, in the same assembly, manifest the most awful enmity against it? It is replied, because the one mix the word with faith, while the other do not. If the question again be moved, how does one come to mix the word with faith, and not another? Then we are told, because he perceives beauty and suitableness in it; which in fact only tends to provoke a repetition of the question, which when made, we are told, that we are not satisfied with the word—we seek a separate spirit, &c. And thus raillery is substituted in the place of argument, and anathemas in the room of scripture

scripture proof. In opposition to this sentiment it may be observed, that the highest evidence has been presented to the wise and learned, of the truth and divinity of the scriptures, without success. Rational and scriptural arguments have been urged, by him who spake as never man spake, with the addition of miracles to confirm what he said, and yet all proved ineffectual; and he who knew what was in man, informs us, that *No man can come unto him, except the father draw him.* The preaching of Paul drew the contempt of the wise and learned, and was a stumbling block to the religious, 1. Cor. i, 23, and he points out the cause of this, 1. Cor. ii, 14, *The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* The Pharisees made many converts; the judaizing teachers propagated their false gospels with wide success; yet neither reason, scripture, nor miracles did, in themselves, make men in love with the truth. Such is the natural and wilful darkness of man—such the awful insatiation that the god of this world spreads over the soul—and such the spirituality of divine truth; that until supernatural influence be exerted, gross darkness will remain. But here let it be observed, that unbelief is infinitely criminal, and that the whole blame of disbelieving the gospel lies at the sinner's door; Matt. xi, 20—25, John vi, 44, chap. viii, 42—47, chap. xv, 22, Matt. xxii, 1—7.

If any one is made wise unto salvation, it must be either by the creature, willing and running, or else through the Lord showing mercy. But the scripture saith it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; and indeed, nothing is more firmly established in the sacred records, than that the eternal purpose of grace, manifested by the appearing of God our Saviour, and published in the scriptures of truth, is only applied to sinners by the Holy Spirit. All who are
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born of God are said to be *born of the Spirit*—all who have good hope through grace, abound in it *through the power of the Holy Ghost*—all who believe in Christ, and so are saved from the wrath to come, *obey the truth through the Spirit*, and are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by *the spirit of our God*;—love to God also is shed abroad in the heart *by the Holy Ghost*; in short, the kingdom of Christ in the souls of his people is righteousness, peace, and joy *in the Holy Ghost*.

Again: our Lord when speaking of the Spirit says, *He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*. Here is a plain distinction between the words which Christ spoke, and the *spirit* by whom the disciples were guided into the truth of those words. It is plain, therefore, that they come very near, if they do not actually plunge into the sin against the Holy Ghost, who do not believe and confess, that no one understands the truth, but by HIS teaching; or believes it, but by HIS persuasion; or obeys it, but through HIS influence and power. I suppose it is customary, upon some occasions, for this class of professors to *pray*; though I cannot see what propriety there is in their doing so, at any time or upon any occasion, while they retain this notion: for if we do not believe that divine influences are essentially necessary to give the word success, why should we pray to the Father of mercies to edify, sanctify, and comfort us in reading or hearing the word? Is not this drawing near with the lips, while the heart is far from God? And must not such prayers be an abomination in the sight of the Lord? And can any holding this sentiment, pray in faith for a blessing upon the word?

But on the other hand it is readily admitted, that the doctrine of the operation of the Spirit of truth has been much abused and traduced, by men who have not the Spirit; who teach that his operations
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are wrought by *mere energy*, making impressions upon the mind without the word of grace: yea, some have ascribed to his agency, the most crude, ludicrous, and even diabolical whims and fancies: all of which must also be an abomination in the sight of the Lord; and if the holy anointing oil (which was a type of the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit) was forbidden to be counterfeited, on pain of being cut off from the people, *Exod. xxx. 31—33*, surely nothing can be more heinously wicked, nothing more pernicious to men, than counterfeiting the operation of the Holy Spirit, or imposing the delusions of the spirit of darkness upon men, under the sanction of God's work. Yet what is more common among professors of religion, than to call every rapturous humor of the mind, every impulse of the imagination, and every false fire of the passions, the work and operation of the Spirit of God? And if any one, out of zeal for God, and love to their souls, faithfully expose the delusion, and affectionately warn them to avoid the fatal snare; he will be thought an enemy to their peace, and be branded as an opposer of the work of the Spirit.

It is still thought by some, that miracles, or something like them are included in the work of the Spirit, even as in the Apostles' days. Such would do well to consider, that those things, which through the power of the Spirit, were wrought by the Apostles, were intended as confirmations of the truth which they preached; but when the whole mind and will of God to his church was completed, their end was answered, and their use ceased; for if they had been continued after revelation was declared to be completed, it would have been an argument against that declaration. Whoever therefore pretends to them, or is waiting for them, errs, not knowing the scriptures.

Again: it is generally thought that his saving work consists in disposing the mind to seriousness, restraining

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restraining evil practices, and in working good dispositions and heavenly tempers, as they are called. But a person may have much seriousness about him, be very decent in his carriage among men, have a number of what he may think good and heavenly dispositions, and yet all this be nothing more than the effects of that principle, common to mankind, which teaches poor sinners to fancy themselves better than others, and that they are approaching very near in likeness to God, and so leads them to establish their own righteousness. Whatever teaches a poor sinner to do this, is not of God, but is that spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Further : it is thought that terrors of conscience, fearful sights of God, and despair in the soul, proceed from the operation of the Spirit of truth. But this arises from a mistaken notion, and wrong application of what Christ says, John xvi. 8, *He shall convince the world of sin, &c.* He explains himself v. 9 (to take up his words, and put a construction of our own upon them, therefore, when the great Prophet condescends to explain, is, to say the best of it, very disingenuous indeed !) He informs us that his Spirit would act as *the Comforter* in this operation, v. 7, by showing the world their sin in not believing in him ; which could not possibly be done, without giving them an understanding to know him that is true ; and the knowledge of him would keep them from tormenting despair on the one hand, and from self-righteous confidence, on the other. But many things which are not sins, because not a breach of any divine law, are sometimes attributed to the work of the Spirit ; such as the remorse which seizes the conscience of the P. p.ist for eating flesh on a fast day, or a consciousness of guilt tormenting the mind of a Protestant Dissenter, as the consequence of having broken one or other of the laws of his particular church-covenant, &c. and this concern of mind can readily be removed without the atoning blood
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of Christ. It will be inquired, perhaps, how people come to be convinced of sin? And the scripture teaches us to reply, that convictions of sin, followed with torment and tending to despair, arise from the natural conscience, and the holy law; Rom. ii. 14, 15, ch. iii. 20; the one revives and enforces the genuine dictates of the other, and conviction arising from this quarter, will not suffer a person to think himself in a fair way of deliverance from the threatened wrath; any more than a felon's being apprehended would be to him a hopeful sign of his being acquitted. Neither will this kind of conviction prevailing in the mind suffer the least attempt to deliver himself out of the hands of his offended Sovereign; but will rather show him that nothing but death and destruction are his just portion. Nor will he (I mean, while natural conscience is permitted to speak its genuine language) imagine that God will assist him to make his escape. But, as it hath been already hinted, many terrors may possess the mind, where the person has never been convinced of the evil of sin; such as frightful views of hell, impressions upon the imagination that the flames of hell are kindling about him, &c. by which he might be drove into actual despair, as thinking he is reprobated—that his day of grace is passed, or that he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. For persons to be encouraged therefore to extract any degree of hope, peace, or encouragement from their convictions, is but drawing off their hope from a profane to a self-righteous foundation; is only changing from an obvious delusion, to a more subtle and secret one, which makes their situation the more dangerous.

And as the *nature* of the Spirit's work has been grossly mistaken; so also has the *manner* of it been sadly misunderstood. It has been generally thought that his manner of working is by some secret whisper, impression, or operation, *without the written word*;

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word; whereby sinners are taught to believe that a work of grace is begun in them, and from which they are instructed to conclude that they are the dear children of God. But without transgressing the bounds of scripture charity, it may be observed, that whatever spirit impresses, influences, or comforts a sinner, by any thing aside from what is written in the word of God, is fitly denominated, and justly characterized by the following epithets, *the spirit of the world—the spirit of disobedience—the spirit of error—the spirit of antichrist—the spirit of slumber, &c.* The direct tendency of whose teachings are, to promote that work of self-dependance which he began in our first parents; and one justly observes on this head, that “ This *self-dependance* may be ranked among the *most dangerous* of the infernal politics, because the fatal poison lies *deep*, and is too often undiscerned.”

I shall now proceed to give some account of the Spirit of grace and his work, by which alone we know the things which are freely given us of God. The spirit of whom we now speak, is distinguished from every other, under the titles of the *holy spirit—the spirit of God—the spirit of truth—the good spirit—the spirit of judgment—the spirit of knowledge—the spirit of wisdom—the spirit of faith—the spirit of grace—and the spirit of glory*. These sacred epithets plainly set forth the nature of his work; and that we may speak of it with all becoming reverence, let us remember that *the spirit is God*; which should cause us to tremble, lest we ascribe any work to him, unworthy of his wisdom, justice, holiness, or truth. The work of this sacred agent is to testify of Christ—to glorify him—to lead into truth, and to comfort the disciples of Jesus. But our safest way of proceeding, will be to hear the faithful and true witness speak upon the subject, John xvi. 13—15, *When he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak—he shall glorify me:*

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for he shall take of mine, and show it unto you. All that the father hath are mine, therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and show it unto you. From hence we learn, that the sole work of the promised Spirit is to glorify Christ, by testifying of him : and lest we should fancy that the Father would be dishonored thereby, we are informed, that all things that the Father hath are Christ's ; even every divine excellency, perfection and glory. Moses and the Prophets, who wrote under the influence, and by the direction of the Spirit of grace, had Christ for their theme ; many subordinate subjects it is true were introduced by them, to illustrate and confirm this one grand design ; but to testify of Jesus in his person and sufferings, and to speak of the glory that should follow, was their primary design in writing, 1 Peter i. 11. Rev. xix. 10. Acts x. 43. And as it was the prophets delightful employ, to testify of Christ through the Spirit ; so also was it in the one grand theme of the apostles of our Lord, on whom this Spirit in his rich effusions rested. Paul in giving a summary of the doctrine which himself and fellow apostles advanced, says *we preach Christ crucified*. Hence it is plain, that the whole Bible is a testimony of Jesus ; even as himself saith, *search the scriptures—for they testify of me*. The Spirit of grace, therefore, through the whole of his work, of enlightening, quickening, edifying, and comforting sinners ; speaks not of any thing distinct from, much less opposed to, the glory and compassion of Jesus. He shall not speak of *himself* ; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. If then the Spirit of truth does not speak of *himself*, it cannot be supposed that he will lead any whom he instructs to speak of any work of his separate from Christ, who is the alone subject of his testimony. Whatever influence then, men are led by, to talk of a work of grace, that is not wrought by the Spirit's testimony of the things of Christ ; we may with certainty conclude that it is not of God. Much less then can we suppose that this glorious

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glorious agent, leads any to speak great things of *themselves*: of their own supposed efforts, pious exertions, humble breathings, holy strivings, &c. and to call them *his* regenerating influences. Far otherwise; his work stains the pride of man, by laying his fancied honor in the dust; and presenting a source of glorying in the Lord alone. But this doctrine deserves a more particular illustration. First: as the employment of the blessed Spirit is to lead into TRUTH, even the whole truth *as it is in Jesus*, of consequence he has no hand in teaching any thing inconsistent with, or unworthy of the truth. He speaks and communicates, only the things of Christ, and of the Father whom Christ reveals; which things are *written*: there can, therefore, be no divine operation, but what is wrought by the concurring influence of the *word* and *spirit* of truth. Is it the Spirit's work to regenerate the soul? We are also said to be begotten by *the word of truth*, and *through the gospel*. Are his regenerating influences compared to the old creation? It was by the *word of the Lord* that the heavens were made. He *spoke* and it was done; he *commanded*, and it stood fast. Is his work compared to the resurrection? That will take place by the dead hearing Christ's voice, John v. 24, 25. In one word, the beginning, and his future operations upon the souls of his disciples, in nourishing, comforting, establishing, and sanctifying them; are performed by the *word of grace*. It is by the *babes* partaking of the *sincere milk of the word*, that they grow into a more advanced state in Christ; and it was only by being nourished up in the *words of faith*, and of good doctrine that Timothy could be fitted for the work of the ministry. And as the work of sanctification is carried on in the soul, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, so our Lord informs us, that it is *the truth*, even the *word of truth*, that sanctifies, John xvii. 17, and ye are clean *through the word* which I have

spoken unto you, see also Eph. v. 25, 26. To what has been observed it may be added, that the Spirit of grace never leads any to misapply the word; never comforts by the word in any other way, than by giving a true understanding of it, and applying the true sense of the passage to the soul. He does not speak a jot more than is contained in the written word; or lead to perceive any thing in one part of scripture, that is contrary to, or inconsistent with, the general scope of revelation.—Here I shall take the liberty to introduce the sentiment of *Calvin* upon this doctrine; that they who call themselves by his name, and yet plead for a work of the Spirit separate from the word, may see how improperly they bear the name of *Calvinists*. He enquires of those who hold the spirit's operation without the word, “Whether they have tasted of any other Spirit than that which the Lord promised to his disciples?—But what manner of spirit did he speak of in the promise? Even that Spirit which should not speak of *himself*, but should minister, and inspire into their minds, those things which he, the Lord himself, had taught *by his word*.—It is not therefore the office of the Spirit which is promised to us, to feign new and unheard of revelations, or to coin a new doctrine, whereby we should be led from the received doctrine of the gospel; but to seal in our minds *the self-same doctrine* that is commended to us *by the gospel*.—If any spirit, leaving the wisdom of the *word of God*, doth thrust unto us another doctrine; that same spirit ought rightfully to be suspected of vanity and lying. But lest under his (the Spirit of God's) name, the spirit of Satan should creep in, he will have us to know him by that image of himself, which he hath *printed in the scripture*.—The Holy Ghost doth so stick fast in his truth, which he hath expressed in the scripture, that *then only* he putteth forth and displays his force, when the scripture has its due reverence and dignity.—The faithful know none other

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other spirit, but that which dwelt and spake in the apostles, by whose oracles we are continually called to the hearing of the word." Calvin's Instit. B. 1. Chap. 9.

Having thus briefly noticed the *manner* of the divine Spirit's operations, let us now attend a little to the *nature* of them. In general it may be observed, that when any one is instructed by him, he learns some precious truth of the word, which previously he was ignorant of—or some truth which he had been before taught, is seasonably revived in his mind, and his soul confirmed in the true understanding thereof; of which, comfort, direction, or support will be the consequence. But more particularly, his work is to convince of unbelief—to reconcile those who are at enmity against the truth, to it—and to further enlighten, quicken, comfort, and confirm the souls of the disciples.

To fasten a conviction of UNBELIEF, even in the hearts of the wise, the learned, the devout, &c. as well as the profane, is the peculiar work of God, the sovereign of the conscience; it is what no man can do for himself, or work in another. This will plainly appear if we advert to the days when, what our Lord says of the Spirit was eminently confirmed. The apostles went forth, not in the wisdom of the scribes, or the disputers of this world, or with the charms of human eloquence; but preaching Jesus and the resurrection, declaring the testimony that God had given of his Son, that he was well pleased in him. By this testimony they commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, declaring with all boldness, *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* And though the gates of hell were moved against their testimony—though the god of this world exerted every artifice to blind the minds of men, and pervert the truth—though the lords of the gentiles, and the tyrants of the earth opposed it—

though the men, who were in the highest repute for philosophy and universal literature, and were believed to be the most pious and devout upon the face of the earth, did all they could to prevent the name of Jesus from being mentioned; yet the Spirit of truth bore down, with irresistible evidence, the prejudices which men of all ranks had imbibed—convinced them that the whole world was guilty and in unbelief—emboldened many to receive the testimony—openly to confess salvation and eternal life through it, and made them willing to suffer the loss of all things for it, yea, encouraged them rather to give up their lives, than let go the truth. But still it will be inquired, *How* does the Spirit convince of unbelief? In reply to which I would inquire, how do we come to know that we have been in error, about things in general which we have heard, and either denied to be true, or received under some mistaken notion, but by receiving a true understanding of the matter? Even so it is in the question under consideration. Man, previous to divine teaching, either wholly rejects the testimony of God, or receives it in a natural, carnal sense. But when the Spirit of grace enlightens the understanding, to know the truth as it is in Jesus; when he sets before any one the true grace of God, and gives him to behold the authority of God in his word, the soul readily discovers its former error; perceives its dangerous situation while in a state of ignorance; forsakes its former oppositions to the truth, or false notions about it; is ashamed of its evil ways, repents of them, and turns unto the Lord. The Spirit, therefore, convinces of unbelief, in giving an understanding to know him that is true.

Again: his work consists in reconciling enemies to God. It is a maxim that has not yet been refuted, that *the determination of the will, must evermore follow the illumination, conviction, and notice of the understanding.* Without staying to illustrate this at large,
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it may be observed; that scripture and matter of fact clearly show, that, when a sinner beholds the beauty and excellency of God in Christ, as displayed in the gospel, he immediately chooses that most lovely manifestation of the true God as his *chief good*. It is contrary to scripture to maintain, that the Holy Spirit, in his operation upon the minds of men, exerts any power that does the least injury to the highest, the most rational sense of human liberty, which consists in chusing what we like best; and yet every part of his work is founded in pure sovereignty, directed by infinite wisdom, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. This blessed agent does not drag the sinner unwillingly, or against his will; but by bringing near to his view, the infinite loveliness of Jesus, and the preciousness, freeness and glory of the gospel; and thus by filling the understanding with the light of truth, the man's will becomes effectually determined. The soul finds the charms of Christ so irresistibly strong, that every power thereof is drawn out after him; so that now, should any other object propose itself as the *supreme good*; the happy sinner would without hesitation say, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He is now reconciled to the one way of salvation by free grace and sovereign mercy. It appears, therefore, that the essential difference between a real work of the Spirit of God, and every counterfeit thereof, is this, that to the one it is given to *know* the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; he has heard the word of God and *understood* it; while the natural man, whatever notions he has obtained of the gospel, *knoweth not* the things of the Spirit of God, &c. It may be added, that when a sinner is reconciled to God by the Spirit, he will not be led thereby, to talk of a certain previous round of feelings which he has had, or serious acts which he has exerted; but will frankly confess, that all his strivings, and earnest and laborious exertions, in seeking, fasting, praying,

ing, resolving, &c. before he knew the truth in which he now rejoices; only tended to fear his conscience, and draw off his attention from the hope of the gospel; so that in all, he was doing that abominable thing that God hated;—that now his only refuge is divine grace—his only hope, that sovereign mercy which the gospel makes manifest, and which the most profane have an equal right to with himself.

Further: Christ promised not to leave his people comfortless; but to send the promise of his Father upon them, even the Comforter, who should bring all those things to their remembrance, that he had spoken unto them, and thereby comfort their hearts with peace and joy, while in the world they had tribulation. This he does by leading them into the grand, sublime, and inexhaustible fulness of the mystery which lay hid in God; by gradually opening their understanding, and causing them thereby to grow up into *all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; filling them with all the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; strengthening them thereby, with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.*

We may now collect a summary of what has been said upon this matter: All men by nature are in error, ignorance, and unbelief—going on in a course of deception, deceiving and being deceived—no one but the Spirit of grace can spiritually enlighten, and comfortably undeceive them——this he does, not by the exertion of power without instruction, nor yet by teaching any doctrine about himself separate from Christ, but by taking of *the word of the truth of the gospel*, and causing that to enter into the soul, he thereby communicates the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ—that, as in the first beginning of his work on the mind,

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mind, he uses no other instrument but the *written word*, so in all his future instructions, quickenings, &c. he proceeds by the same rule; which rule is the only touchstone that we have to try the operation of spirits by.

To conclude: as the whole process of divine grace is sovereign, free, and efficacious; so the work of the Spirit uniformly wears the same aspect. All his operations are sovereign:—in every act the arm of the Lord is manifested, John iii. 8; no one can assign a reason why the wind should come, at any particular time, from one point in preference to another; or why it goes in that direction, not in this; but that so it pleaseth its sovereign director. Neither can any account for one out of a particular company of hearers, and he perhaps the most illiterate, unthinking, and rebellious, coming to the knowledge of the truth and rejoicing therein, while the rest continue in enmity to it; but that the Spirit quickeneth whom he will. All his operations are also perfectly and unconditionally free. It was the crime of Simon Magus that he thought the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money: and it would have been a happy circumstance, had the spirit and essence of his crime died with him, or with that age; but alas! it is but too evident, while we find persons saying, that when we exert our natural efforts, &c. the Spirit will help us, and turn our natural acts into supernatural ones, that though the letter of Simon's crime is not common among us, the essence of it still prevails. But if the exertions of our natural abilities are the inducements, or *circumstances*, that encourage the Spirit to work, grace is no more grace. And as all his operations are sovereign and free, so are they effectual. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; SO SHALL MY WORD BE THAT*

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GOETH FORTH OUT OF MY MOUTH: IT SHALL NOT RETURN UNTO ME VOID, BUT IT SHALL ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH I PLEASE, AND IT SHALL PROSPER WHEREUNTO I SEND IT.——Isaiah lv. 10, 11.



SECTION VI.

On the Principle of GRACE in the Heart.

IT is thought a matter of very little importance by some, whether we conceive of the principle of grace in the heart previous to, and so distinct from the word of grace, or insist that the word of life, implanted in the soul, is that principle. With all becoming deference to the learned persons, who have attempted to accommodate matters in this respect, the writer of these Essays takes the liberty of saying, that in his view of the matter, one of the most important distinctions is to be made, that concerns the whole system of experimental Christianity; and that the schemes established upon these two hypotheses, are as much opposed to each other, in their nature, and necessary tendency, as light and darkness, or Christ and Beliel.

The reader will observe, that the important difference attempted to be stated in this section, is not whether there is any such thing as a supernatural principle, or habit of grace, in the soul; nor whether that principle be abiding when implanted; nor yet whether it is the work of the Holy Spirit to implant it: all these things are admitted, as important and undeniable facts. But our principal inquiries are,—wherein does the nature of the principle of grace consist? and, are there any preparatives of any kind thereunto? —It will not be amiss here to lay down some general, and scriptural truths, which may

may tend to shorten this Section: such as that, — man is by nature *dead in sins*, nothing but spiritual death is to be found in the unregenerate soul, — all works proceeding from man in that state are *dead works*; for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit: — there can no spiritual life be infused into man but what proceeds from Christ; so that “He that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life;” — the figures, metaphors, representations, &c. which set forth the darkness of the mind, or man’s sinful state by nature, do not lead us to any gross conceptions of the disease, as though it is something *material*, and so needs some *physical* or *mechanical* power to be exerted to rectify it*: but rather, the scripture doctrine of the fall is, that the moral rectitude of the soul is disordered, the understanding darkened through error, ignorance, and unbelief, whereby the will is influenced to rebellion, the affections are become unholy, sensual, and brutal; all of which is made manifest by false worship, false hope, false comforts and evil works; by the deep-rooted enmity of the heart against God, and the aversion there is to depend simply upon his word. These things premised, I shall now proceed to take some notice, of the prevailing notion of a *principle* of grace in the soul, I mean previous to the *word of life* being implanted there, by the Holy Spirit.

What is generally asserted upon this subject is this, that there is in regeneration, an inherent, spiritual principle implanted in the soul, previous to, and so separate from the hearing, understanding, and receiving

* No subject has been more betroped and defigured than the article of *inherent grace*. Scriptural writers speak figuratively of the religion of the heart — they call it *circumcision* — *dying* — *living* — *seed* — *creation*, and so on; and many divines, instead of reducing metaphor to meaning, affix gross notions to these terms, and cover them with grosser still, till one would think conversion consisted in the actual addition of some new bodily organs, or mental powers, when nothing perhaps is intended but the *belief of a truth* or the *practice of a virtue*. — *Claude’s Essay on the composition of a Sermon*, vol. I. p. 398.

receiving the gospel of Christ. The nature of this principle, the manner of its coming into the soul, and the use that should be made of it when discovered there, are matters about which the professing world is by no means agreed; some plead for certain principles in the soul, previous to this principle; but here again they are divided, wherein these principles consist; while others maintain, so far justly, that there is no medium betwixt being dead in sins, and being new creatures; and these generally hold, that this principle is infused into the soul, it does not know when, how, or where, or in fact whether it is there or no, till by the help of some kind, casual friend, he is *enabled* to persuade himself that it is so. Though it frequently happens, that to a person's dying day he remains in painful suspense, and dreadful anxiety about it. But let us hear each of these divided parties speak for themselves.

“Man comes to the grace, whereby we are regenerated in Christ, by a natural faculty; as in asking, seeking, knocking; and *before* they are born again, there is repentance, a sorrow for sin, a change of life for the better, and a beginning of faith, and an initial love of God, and a desire of grace: these are an *occasion*” (how modestly expressed) “by which God is *moved* to bestow his grace. For such is the mercy of God, that he recompenses these *very small* beginnings of good, with this illustrious reward.” We have the same sentiment given us in the following words. “Some work of man therefore goes before his vivification; viz. to acknowledge and bewail his death; to will and desire deliverance from it; to hunger, thirst, and seek after life. all which and a GREAT DEAL BESIDES is required by Christ in those whom he will make alive.” To these things it has been replied, that since we are *dead in trespasses and sins* we can do nothing before, by way of preparation for grace; unless we think sinful thoughts and rebellious actions will do it. But, moreover,
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we have seen persons, the best disposed for this kind of grace, the person mentioned Matt. xix, for instance: he was full of good intentions, inflamed with a desire after heaven, and of a blameless life before men, notwithstanding which, he was disappointed; and there was another, whom we are told was not far from the kingdom of heaven, wanted, as it were, but one step, and yet publicans and harlots, who were void of the least good qualification, went in before those who were civilly righteous, and externally religious. Nor does it happen favorable to this scheme, that the scriptures point out several examples or actual proofs of the assertion, that in the first manifestation of grace to the soul, God is found of them that sought him not: and made manifest to them that asked not after him. But we have been ingeniously informed upon this head, for the encouragement of the well-disposed, that "He is sometimes found of them that seek him not;—*much more* will he be found of them that seek him, in his appointed way." If we call to mind the true signification, of the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto men, it will readily appear that, upon this plan, *grace is no more grace.*

There are others who agree in the main with the class above referred to, about the nature of this principle, and with them insist upon the necessity, of some kind of pre-requisites thereunto, who yet would seem to differ from them, about the author of these previous principles, and the design of their being wrought in the mind. "In persons to be regenerated is required a breaking of the natural obstinacy, and a flexibility of the will—a sound law-work upon the soul—a legal fear of punishment and a dread of hell, &c. and some anxiety about deliverance." But then we are informed that, "These things are not produced by nature alone, but are rather to be conceived of as the effects of the spirit of bondage preparing a way to himself for their ac-

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tual regeneration. And that God does not bestow the grace of regeneration from a regard to, or moved by occasion of these preparations, much less by any merit in them, but God in this manner *levels a way for himself, fills vallies, depresses mountains and hills, in order the better to smoothe a way for his entrance into the soul.*" To which it has been replied, that all this, and more is common to those, who perish, and therefore cannot, either *from the nature of the thing, or the intention of God*, be preparative for regeneration. Not the former: for however great these things may appear to be, yet they continue within the verge of spiritual death; and sinners are so far from being disposed thereby to *spiritual life*, that on the contrary, deceived by these acts, which counterfeit spiritual life, they are the more hardened in real death, and fondly pleasing themselves, are at a greater distance from inquiring after *true life*, which they falsely imagine they have obtained. Not the latter: for no intention of God can be rendered void. (see *Wusius* on Regeneration.) It may be added that the grace of God does not consider man as upon the return to God—willing to be saved, and only needing a little help; but as being quite indisposed, even so much as to hearken to God's method of salvation; or rather, quite at enmity with the God of grace; though it is natural enough for sinners to be in love with a false, or what Paul terms a perverted gospel. Hence the complaint which the Saviour brings against them is not, they are not sincerely disposed to come—they have not yet had a sound *law work* upon their souls;—they are not sufficiently terrified with the dread of hell, &c. but **YE WILL NOT COME UNTO ME.** The fact is, God would have the ends of the earth, sinners at the greatest distance from him, to behold the salvation which he has provided, and live; but sinners will not come *as such*, and yet they fancy they are willing to come. It is plain they want to make a more creditable

creditable appearance, before they do come, that when they approach, it may be manifest to all, that God had not so much trouble to save them, as those despicable wretches, the Thief, Zaccheus, &c.

Again: there are others who deny absolutely, any work previous to regeneration, who yet zealously maintain, that a principle of grace is infused into the soul, by the Spirit of God, *previous to*, and distinct from the gospel of grace, which principle contains the habits of every other grace, faith, hope, love, &c. which principle also disposes the soul, to receive and delight in the word of God; for we are told that "The principles of faith, hope and love, must be in the soul *prior* to the knowledge of what we are to believe, hope in, and love." This kind of doctrine is so mystical and metaphysical (not to say enthusiastical and unintelligible) that though it plainly appears what it leads to, yet to reconcile it either to scripture or common sense, would be a task unsurmountable to any but those who are skilled in the *depths* of the doctrine. The following sentence seems, in some measure, to set forth the notion under consideration. "The reason why the word of Christ was effectual upon Peter's hearers, when three thousand were converted, and that it had no success at Chorazin and Bethsaida, when Christ himself preached, is not to be attributed to any different energy upon the mind of one more than the other; but rather to the different *principles* of those to whom it came—the word is attended with *the same power* and efficacy, simply considered in itself, in all places, and at all times: the difference, and reason of its success is, one is *principled*, and the other is not; and therefore, had all had the same principles, all would have received it alike." *

* A friend upon reading the above observes, in a letter to the author of these Essays, that "This *previous principle* destroys the use of prayer for a blessing upon the word; all prayer on such principles must be *conditional*, thus, "If thou seest any here *already principled*

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I shall not stay here to remark upon this sentence, which it is obvious is contrary to the true grace of God, and virtually, with the Arminians, opposes the work of the Spirit; but proceed to consider the principles upon which this notion is founded. And we are told, that “Man being dead in trespasses and sins, void of the least degree of spiritual life, he must necessarily be *passive* in the work of regeneration, FOR DEAD MATTER CANNOT ACT. But where ever the word of grace is received to any good purpose, it always supposes the mind to be active in the entrance thereof. Therefore, sound reason teaches us to conclude, that there must of necessity be a principle of life existing in the soul, before it can hear, understand, and receive the word, and so cannot be the grace of the gospel implanted: nor can the word be the instrument of implanting it; unless we can conceive, with any degree of rationality, of one seeing without eyes, hearing without ears, receiving without action, or believing the word of God without faith.” Here we are presented with an argument, blended with scripture and some sort of metaphysical philosophy, which the apostles were cautious to keep separate, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; for to entertain precious souls with philosophical speculation, about the *activity* and *passivity* of the mind in receiving the truth, tends to lead them from *that* which alone can give peace to the conscience, purity in the soul, and holiness in the life.

That man is dead in trespasses and sins, is an awful fact, admitted and much lamented—that he must therefore be necessarily passive in regeneration is freely granted—and that “dead matter cannot act,” is also readily

cipled for the reception of the word, bless it to them.” If the word is attended with the *same power* in all places, and at all times, it would be as foolish for me to pray for a blessing at any given time, as for me to pray, that the Sun may rise March 19th, 1784, an hour sooner than it did former years. ‘Tis Arminianism in the form of Calvinism.”

readily acknowledged. But surely that system of philosophy that would teach us to compare "dead matter" to a SPIRIT that cannot but think and be conscious, ought not to be reputed sound. It is plain that man *can* be regenerated, he has faculties in which the principles of regeneration *can* be wrought; but *dead matter* cannot, in the same sense, be regenerated; and so then the parallel is altogether impertinent to the subject. And if a possibility of being regenerated is intended, by having the principles of faith, &c. it is granted. Yet it is quite philosophical to reply, that "dead matter" may be set in motion by a body or power superior to it: and when we think of God, and behold his works, we must say, is any thing too hard for him? But we have instances recorded in the scripture of the power of the *divine word* to animate and vivify even "dead matter." "And God said let the EARTH bring forth living creatures," &c. And of the truth of this we have full evidence at the grave of him who had been dead four days, John xi. 39—44. Here we behold that *dead matter* was forcibly and effectually worked upon and quickened by the *living word* of Jesus. But dismissing any further remarks about dead matter; let us turn our attention to a *living spirit*.

The minor proposition we will beg leave to deny, which may be done without falling into the absurdity and irrationality of saying a person may see without eyes, hear without ears, &c. and if this can consistently be done, then not only the conclusion must fall to the ground, but most of the arguments for this doctrine being built upon kindred premises, will be weakened, if not overturned. The whole argument goes upon the supposition that in hearing, understanding, and receiving a report or testimony, the mind must necessarily and invariably be, not only *active*, but also *well disposed* to the tidings which it conveys: which seems as though some fatal necessity forced us to love and delight in a thing before we

have either heard or understood any thing about it ! It is granted that the mind frequently, though not necessarily and invariably, is active in receiving a report ; and also, that what it is well disposed to, it frequently seeks to hear of, in order to receive. But very often we receive reports not only without having a good disposition towards them ; but we have been forced to admit them through unquestionable conviction of their reality and truth, even tho' the inclination would wish to oppose them. Thus a criminal receives sentence from his Judge—a servant reproof from his master—and thus, on the day of Pentecost Christ's murderers were convinced of sin sorely against their inclination. And are not our minds frequently surprized, by receiving the knowledge of that which gives us pleasure ? But what is that inability in man which is the ground of his opposition to the truth ; are not we too apt to forget ourselves that it is of a moral and spiritual nature ? That it consists in having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and that the soul being under the fatal influence of error, ignorance, and unbelief, it opposes the true grace of God ? Are we not too apt to forget that the language used to describe this awful state is frequently metaphorical, and in consequence thereof, run into some thoughts of a physical or natural death of the soul, or privation of the animal life, at least of the natural faculties ? But does not man's *inability* consist in his loving darkness rather than light, in a disinclination to depend upon a holy sovereign God ; and not from the want of rational faculties, so that he *would* return to, and depend upon God if he *could* ? Now it is perfectly agreeable to sound reason and good sense to say in this case, that if the *cause* of this spiritual death be removed, the necessary effects thereof will be removed also : and if the disease consist in error, ignorance, and unbelief ; these being done

done away, and truth, knowledge, and faith implanted in their stead; the soul must be renewed; the renewal will consist in the implanting of these things; and that which removed their opposites may, with propriety, be termed the means or instrument of the work. If then ignorance, &c. are the very essence of the natural man's darkness; what can remove it but the entrance of the light of divine truth? For as when the sun riseth darkness fleeth away, so *the entrance of the word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple*, Psalm cxix. 130. That is, the word is the very first principle of spiritual light in the soul: and this word, under the direction, and by the essential and vital influence of the Spirit of grace, being engraved on the soul; light, life and spiritual activity are the certain concomitants. As then, the very essence of spiritual death, consists of ignorance about God's true character; of error about the way of salvation by Christ Jesus; and in disbelieving the divine word: and as the true character of God, the way of life, &c. are only made known in the scripture; spiritual death, or man's natural darkness cannot be removed, and the divine life implanted in the soul, but by the entrance of the *word* through the power of the Spirit.

But let us consider those irrational consequences which we are thought to fall into, by this kind of doctrine. (1st,) "It cannot be rationally received, that the principle of grace is the word implanted, unless we can make it out that one can see without eyes." Here it is readily acknowledged, that we must have eyes before we can perceive objects; and also that we must have a spiritual principle before we can discern divine beauties; but it should be kept in mind, that the hinge upon which the inquiry turns is, *what* is that principle, and *how* is it implanted? As it is commonly acknowledged, that Christ's miracles of healing all manner of sicknesses, &c. were signs of his ability to save his people from their

their sins ; so also that the way which he took to perform them, serves as a fit pattern of that way, by which he blesses his chosen with all spiritual blessings. Mark x. 52, informs us, that sight was given to the blind by the *word* of Jesus. It appears to be in the same way that Saul of Tarsus received his sight, Acts ix. 17 : in other cases Jesus chose by his word, to give success to different means, Matt. ix. 28, 29, John ix. 1, though he could have done it by mere invisible energy. We have seen wherein spiritual blindness consists, and likewise how it is removed : to what has been observed might be added, Psalm xix. 8—"The *commandment* of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes," even as we may suppose the entrance of a *torch* enlightens a dark room ; to do which, would it not be absurd to say, that there must of necessity be some principles of light in the dark room, which disposed it to receive the light ? Rather did not the light disperse the darkness ? Even so did the word of Jesus disperse the natural darkness of him mentioned, Mark x. 52 ; and in like manner is spiritual eyesight given to those, whose understanding the god of this world has blinded. (2dly) Nor shall we be driven to embrace the irrational notion, of "hearing without ears ;" for admitting the physical necessity of having the sense of hearing, previous to being active in the reception of sounds ; the point pleaded for is sufficiently established by submitting to the simple dictates of scripture upon this head ; not only in Mark vii. 32, have we an account of a deaf man being brought to Jesus to be cured, and v. 34, of the manner *how* the cure was wrought ; (Jesus looking up to heaven, sighed, and said unto him, *Ephphatha*, that is, be opened, and straightway his ears were opened) but Psalm lviii. 4, 5, spiritual deafness is thus described : "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears : which *will not hear* the voice of charmers, charming never so

so wisely;" plainly showing, that this deafness is not any defect subsisting in the natural faculties, but mere enmity to that which addresses them, Acts vii. 57. Hence it is said, "Bring the deaf men that have ears." And surely he who first formed the ear can, whenever it pleases him, command attention, and by the force of his almighty voice, cause not only the *deaf*, but even the *dead*, to hear and obey him. He saith, Isaiah xxxv. 5. The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; and it should be observed, that the truth as it is in Jesus, is not received upon a long chain of rational conclusions; but upon the authority of him who speaks in the sacred records. We may see this sentiment confirmed in various places in the scriptures.—Our first parents fell by admitting a falsehood into their minds: and they were renewed in *knowledge*, by hearing the voice of the Lord God conveying the welcome tidings of a Saviour. Was there any principle of grace in Adam's heart previous to the hearing the word of reconciliation? And was not the divine word the instrument of conveying that knowledge whereby he was renewed? Surely no one can put on a face to deny the last question; and without doubt corruption and grace, and their methods of working, are the same in all ages.—The case of Matthew is much to our purpose, Luke vi. 27; 28. to see a man of his infamous character—in the midst of his avaricious and oppressive employment, wrought upon by a *word speaking*: so wrought upon as to change the whole bias of his soul; is such a proof that the word is passively implanted—that it is the very first principle of light, and the instrument of regeneration; that it requires a good deal of *art* to make even a tolerable opposition to it.—The instance of Zaccheus recorded Luke xix. 1—6. corroborates the doctrine. It will hardly be thought, that grace in his heart influenced him to climb the tree; for nothing more plain than that he

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was then a graceless wretch. Curiosity seems to have been the motive, that he might the more advantageously behold Jesus, whom he had heard of as an extraordinary person. When the Saviour SAID unto him make haste and come down, &c. the happy effects quickly manifested, that the heavenly word was quick and powerful, and brought every needful requisite along with it.—† Paul's regeneration is thus recorded, Acts ix. 3—8. where it is obvious, that the VOICE accompanied with divine power unstopped his deaf ears.

Let us now consider the genuine import of some passages of scripture which are made use of to prove the *previous principle*: 1st. The implanting of grace in the heart is, Eph. ii. 1. called *quickening*, and we are asked, "What instrument does God make use of to implant the soul in the body?" In reply to this *deep* question, the writer frankly confesses he cannot tell. But if the inquiry be, how is a soul dead in trespasses and sins quickened and made alive unto God, the scriptures furnish us with a sufficient reply, John v. 24, 25. When the word of grace enters into the soul, through divine influence: it conveys the knowledge of Christ which quickens the mind to delight in him, and ardently to long after him, John iv. 10. 1. Cor. xv. 45. 1. John v. 11, 12. As the spirit dwelling in the first Adam's

† Mr. Hervey says, pointing to the apostle's own words in describing his conversion, "Can any thing denote a more iniquitous and savage temper. 'Tis the very picture of an incarnate devil—the favor of man is backward to interpose till something amiable and inviting appears in the object; but the grace of God is immensely rich, and infinitely free. It *prevails* the most vile and hardened rebel, it brings every requisite, and recommendation in its own unspeakable beneficent nature. It accomplishes all its blessed ends, not by any *towardly* disposition in the sinner; but by that one glorious righteousness provided in the Saviour—This overtook the persecutor in his journey to Damascus, light and comfort were poured upon him, *not from any dawn of reformation* in himself, but from a very different quarter; by opening as it were a window in heaven, while he sojourned even in the suburbs of hell. He *saw* that just one, and was made partaker of the ineffable gift."

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body, made him a living soul ; even so Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, begins and maintains the life of God there. Such a soul will say with the psalmist, “ Thy word has quickened me.” 2dly. The implanting grace in the heart is called a resurrection, Eph. i. 19, 20. and the question put in favor of the previous principle is, “ What instrument do you suppose Jehovah made use of, when he raised Christ from the dead, and what instrument will he make use of in the resurrection of the dead ? ” and it has been added “ none at all, no not even his word.” Here it should be observed, that power or efficacy must always be of such a nature as is suited to the object upon which it is exerted. And though it may appear, that the power which raised Christ from the dead was what may be called a *physical* power, it does not follow, that the *same* kind must be exerted towards them that believe ; nay the contrary is manifest, ver. 17, 18. But then we are told that the metaphor is destroyed. By no means ; for in both cases, nothing less than the great power mentioned in the words is exerted by the divine Spirit ; and this is the very essence of the metaphor. And as to the spiritual resurrection, we are expressly told, Col. ii. 12. that it is produced through the faith of the operation of God ; see Ez. xxxvii. 1—10 —3dly. The work is compared to the creation, Eph. ii. 10, and we are asked what instrument was made use of in that work ? and reminded of Job xliv. 24. That the old creation was a figure of the new will appear by comparing the one with the other. The first creation of the world was out of nothing, so nothing was prepared for the second, no good, no virtue, NO PREVIOUS DISPOSITIONS in the subject : yea Something indeed was in being, which had no place in the old ; but that was only rebellion and enmity, making vehement opposition to the almighty grace of God.—The first was performed by the COMMAND of God, the second in like manner “ Of his

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his own will begat he us by the WORD OF TRUTH, James i. 18.—The rudiments of the first were an undigested mass. “*The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep*” Gen. i. 2. In like manner, all things lie in base confusion in the soul, when it is to be adorned by the new creation, and depraved lusts are violently agitated every where, without any order. Those things which should possess the upper place, are depressed to the lowest. There is also a surprising emptiness of every thing that is good, Rom. vii. 18. Neither are all things only surrounded with the gross darkness of ignorance, but the whole soul is nothing but darkness itself, Eph. v. 8. When God was pleased to adorn the world he had created, he began with the production of light, and he takes the same method in this other creation. “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, &c. 2. Cor. iv. 6. † 4thly. The case of infants is thrown in, as an unfurmountable objection to this doctrine; yea it is said that, “Upon this plan there is as much ground for the regeneration and salvation of infants, as there is for that of *devils*!!” That *all* infants are saved, is a pleasing fact founded in the word of truth; for Christ says “Of *such* (that is mostly of *such*) is the kingdom of heaven,” even that innumerable multitude made righteous by the obedience of the divine surety, Rev. vii. 9. Infants have done no evil, and yet die by the imputation of the first Adam’s transgression: they have done no *good* and yet are entitled to eternal life through the obedience of the second Adam, and so enter in upon the very same footing as Paul, and all others that are saved. But it is a hard matter for us to submit to that doctrine which teaches us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. Yet whoever think that their believing, or any activity in themselves whatever, is taken

† See *Wit’s Occon.* B. 4. chap. 6. p. 49—50.

taken into consideration in their justification to eternal life, are without doubt ignorant of the true grace of God. Without admitting the salvation of infants it cannot be shown, how Christ has bruised the serpent's head—destroyed the works of the devil—and abolished death. It is plain infants are among the number mentioned, Rev. xx. 12—15. But they not having done evil, can have no sin charged upon them against either the law of nature, the written law, or the gospel, so cannot be judged and condemned out of these books. We must either say therefore, that there is a Purgatory for them, or, according to some modern refiners of popery, a *middle state*, the notion of which is without the shadow of a foundation in scripture, and is absolute nonsense; or admit, that they are written in the Lamb's book of life. See Deut. i. 39. And if a person is *passive* in receiving the truth, then why may we not say that the efficacy of the divine Spirit can and does implant the truth in the soul of an infant: which we can have as clear conceptions of as that which is so generally admitted, viz: that a falsehood, first instilled into our federal-head, dwells in them, and corrupts their souls. 5thly. It has been thought that the *good and honest* heart mentioned Mat. xiii. 8. Luke viii. 15. is an argument in favor of grace in the heart previous to the truth being implanted. To this it has been observed, that the scope of the parable is to represent the different effects of the word. But this has been cavilled at though never yet sufficiently refuted. Some however have thought that the good and honest heart has reference to those who like Simeon, Cornelius, &c. were waiting for the kingdom of God: who had believed in the Saviour *to come*, and so were justified by his righteousness as Abraham was; and who when they heard the word, testifying that the Christ was actually come, readily received it. From the whole, if grace can be in the heart, previous to the word of Christ

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entering there, then the gospel is not the power of God unto salvation; neither is there any essential need of Christ, especially not of his word. For whoever is regenerated shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, because such being born of God, are heirs of the promise of eternal life; and can this be, without understanding and knowing the true character of God, or believing in the name of Christ, or even hearing of his name? Though the implanting of this principle in the heart, is ascribed to the Spirit of God; it is plain that he has nothing to do in the affair: for it is his office to testify of Jesus, and to apply the things which speak of him. He works, not by energy alone, but by the almighty persuasive force of truth; and by instruction leads those whom he teaches, to speak of Christ and to rejoice in him. But the spirit that implants this previous principle, leads persons to boast but too commonly of *themselves*: he cannot therefore be the Spirit of God; nor is it the true grace of God which he implants; and it must follow, that the various systems of doctrinal and experimental religion, that are founded upon this principle are essentially different, in their *nature* and necessary tendency, from the gospel of the grace of God. Their necessary tendency therefore must be to mislead, perplex and entangle; if not to delude and destroy the souls, who are founding their hope of eternal life upon them.

Having said so much in opposition to the distinct, previous principle of grace in the heart generally pleaded for, and but too commonly made the foundation of a professor's hope, as it is most obviously the source of various errors, more especially in experimental religion; I shall do little more in this Section, than briefly show wherein the true principle of grace consists—confirm the sentiment by the word of God—and then show the harmony of this view of the principle of grace, with every other part of the revelation of the true grace of God.

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The *true* principle of grace in the soul is the GOSPEL in its true import, implanted there by the Spirit of God, which is properly a divine *insinuat*, a *living* and *abiding* principle. It counterbalances the corrupt principle which resides in the Soul; and powerfully and effectually inclines it, to desire the sincere milk of the word—to live upon the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ—to exercise every becoming affection towards him, as he is revealed in the word—and influences to a conduct agreeable to the gospel. This is that new heart and right spirit promised in the new covenant, and the scriptures expressly prove that the truth in the love of it, dwelling in the heart, is the *only* grace of God that his Spirit implants, Heb. x. 16. 1st. li. 4. John xii. 49, 50. Rom. iii. 27. ch. viii. 2. Is it inquired how we are made partakers of the DIVINE NATURE, that is, of the *communicable* attributes of God, his wisdom, happiness, love and holiness? Peter informs us that it is through the *knowledge* of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious *promises*; that *by these* you might be made partakers of the divine nature, 2. Peter i. 3, 4. Is it asked, how do we become the children of God? The reply is, “*Being born again, not with corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the WORD OF GOD which LIVETH AND ABIDETH FOR EVER, even the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*” Jam. i. 18. 1 Peter i. 23. The word is the SEED, the supernatural, vital, unchanging, incorruptible principle of *divine life*. Spiritual life is only in Christ, and is communicated from him by knowledge to his people. *God hath given us eternal life and this life is IN HIS SON. He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life,* 1 John v. 11, 12. however much he may amuse himself with a notion of a principle of grace dwelling in his heart. These simple declarations of scripture confirm the doctrine under consideration,

beyond all modest contradiction. This is life eternal to *know* the only true God and Jesus Christ; and if any modern refiner should object to these, a thousand passages that *seem* to make against it, and thereby urge the old insinuation “Yea hath God said, &c. the scriptures being one perfect harmonious system of incorruptible truth, clear of the least contradiction in any of its parts, we should take the plain evidence of these divine witnesses as absolutely decisive, and impute any quibble that forms a seeming contradiction, to the blindness of man, who naturally opposes his own wisdom to the revelation of God. We may here take notice, how suitable the divine word, in the hand of the Spirit is, to perform every operation by which this principle is denominated. Is it called *grace in the heart*? The gospel is styled *The word of grace*. Is it termed *The truth in us*? The gospel is *The word of truth*. Is it called *life*? The scriptures are the *words of life*. Is it conceived of as a principle of *faith*? The gospel record is *The word of faith*, &c.

When this divine principle is implanted in the soul; the true knowledge of God is given. That is, a true knowledge of God in Christ, where justice and mercy in perfection, unite, shine and harmonize. This is the true grace of God. This the soul believes with all his heart. His standing is fixed upon it; and it begets every answerable affection there. Hence the true gospel, being the proper principle of grace, begets in the soul faith, hope, love, &c. and is the genuine source of all true experience. This view of things preserves the glorious system of grace, in its beautiful symmetry, its grand and uniform connection. Let us take a summary view thereof. If we conceive of grace dwelling in the eternal purpose, it is nothing more than Jehovah's sovereign design, of showing favor to the people of his choice, through the Son of his love. If we take the term for the manifestation of his great

great love, free favor and boundless compassion, it is discovered in the incarnation, life, sufferings, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom grace and truth came. If we speak of grace as a doctrine, then it is the word of truth, revealing, explaining, and proclaiming the nature, end, and design of Christ's work, as the Surety of his people. And if we take the term to signify that vital principle, by which we are partakers of spiritual life, it is the doctrine of Christ implanted in the understanding, possessing the will and influencing the affections and conversation: and so conforming the soul to Christ, which was the very end of being chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

I shall close this Essay, with the remarkable words of Dr. Owen, which may be considered as an epitome of the whole. "As the word is in the gospel, so is grace in the heart; yea they are the *same things variously expressed*, Rom. vi. 17, as our translation doth not, so I know not how, in so few words, to express that which is *emphatically* here insinuated by the Holy Ghost. The meaning is, that the doctrine of the gospel begets the *form, figure, image, or likeness* of itself, in the hearts of them that believe: so they are cast into the *mould* of it. As is in the one, so is the other. The principle of grace in the *heart*, and that in the *word*, are as children of the same parent compleatly resembling and representing one another. Grace is a *living word*, and the word is figured, *limned grace*. As we have heard, so have we seen and found it; such a soul can produce the *duplicate* of the word and so adjust all things thereby. The first original expression of divine truth is not in the word, no not as given out from the infinite abyss of divine wisdom and veracity, but it is first hid, laid up, and expressed in the person of Christ. HE is the first pattern of truth, which from him is expressed in the *word*, and *from, and by the word impressed* on the hearts of believers; so that as it hath pleased God that all the

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treasures of wisdom and knowledge should be in him, dwell in him, have their principal residence in him, Col. ii. 3. So the whole word is but a revelation of the *Truth in Christ*, or an expression of his image and likeness to the sons of men. Thus we are said to *learn the truth as it is in Jesus*, Eph. iv. 21. It is *in Jesus originally*, and really, and from him it is communicated unto us by the word. We are thereby *taught*, and do learn it; for thereby, as the apostle proceeds, *we are renewed in the spirit of our mind*, and do put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness, ver. 23, 24. First, the truth is in Jesus; then it is expressed in the word; *this word*, learned, and believed, becomes *grace in the heart*, every way answering unto the Lord Christ his *image*, from whom this *transforming truth* did thus proceed. Nay, this is carried by the apostle yet higher, namely, unto God the Father himself, whose *image* Christ is, and believers his, through the word, 2 Cor. iii. 18. "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord," whereunto add, chap iv. 6. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." The first pattern or example of all truth and holiness is God himself: hereof Christ is the *image*, ver. 4. Christ is the image of God, "The brightness of his glory and the express image of his person;" Heb. i. 3. "The image of the invisible God;" Col. i. 15. Hence we are said to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; because he, being *his image*, the love, grace, and truth of the Father are represented and made conspicuous in him. For we are said to behold it *in his face*, because of the open and *illustrious* manifestation of the glory of God in him. And how do we behold this glory? in a glass (as in a glass) that is in the
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the gospel, which hath the image and likeness of Christ, who is the image of God, reflected upon it, and communicated unto it. So have we traced truth, and grace, from the person of the Father, unto the Son as *Mediator*, and thence transfused it into the word. In the Father it is *essentially*; in Jesus Christ *originally and exemplarily*; and in the word as in a *transcript* or copy. But doth it abide there? No, God by the word of the gospel shines into our hearts. He irradiates our minds with a saving light into it, and apprehension of it. And what thence ensues? the soul of a believer is *changed into the same image*, by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost, chap. iii. 18. that is, the *likeness* of Christ implanted on the word, is impressed on the soul itself, whereby it is renewed into the image of God, whereunto it was at first created. This brings all into perfect harmony." *

* See Dr. Owen on the 130th Psalm, p. 168—170.



ESSAY II.

On the NATURE of FAITH.

—ONE FAITH. Eph. iv. 5.

INTRODUCTION.

IT has much prevailed as a fashionable sentiment, though it displays great ignorance of human wretchedness, and the vast extent of the holy law, that if we walk before God according to that light which is afforded us, either by nature, or religious instruction; our services will be pleasing to God, and without doubt we shall be happy with him for ever. From hence it has been argued; that if it be true

true that man can please God here, and enjoy him hereafter, by doing the best he can, there can be no necessity for him to trouble himself about those matters of *opinion*, about which even the wise, the learned, and the religious are so much divided. Yea it has been thought that an attention to those things has been the grand cause of the present glaring declension in *PIETY*. But surely such are not aware, that this sentiment is immediately opposed, and effectually overthrown by the unerring word of God, which declares that *without FAITH it is impossible to please him*: and also that there is no acceptable worship without it; *for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. Which includes, not only a belief that there is a God, which the devils believe and tremble at, but that he is such an one as the scriptures represent him to be. To form ideas of the great God contrary to his true character, and to worship him according to our own false imaginations; is to worship we know not what; is to worship, in fact, an imaginary god. All such worship, therefore, although attended with the formalities of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, supplication, dedication, &c. and with the most animated harangues, about the excellencies of virtue, and the extensive rewards of piety, or even of the happiness and comfort of the people of God, is not only unprofitable, being unmixed with faith, but odious and abominable in the sight of God. *Isaiah lxvi. 3, 4. Rom. xiv. 23. Psalm l. 21.*

Again: true holiness, whether of heart or conversation, cannot possibly be without *faith*, for in reality faith is the grand source from whence it flows. Such is the inseparable connection betwixt faith and sanctification, that where *works* do not appear, faith is dead; and where *faith* does not dwell, works are dead also. Works, therefore, without faith in Christ, however splendid, are of no account at all
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in the sight of God ; and the heart not being purified by faith, being naturally polluted, cannot but bring forth corrupt fruits, even as a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

Further : faith is essentially necessary to salvation. The scripture teaches us, that there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved, but the sacred name of Jesus Christ, and most solemnly avers, *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God*, John iii. 18—36 ; and notwithstanding the most decent appearance among men, unbelievers are ranked in that black list of characters, that are excluded the kingdom of heaven. Luke xii. 46, Rev. xvi. 8.

The necessity and importance of proceeding with the greatest care, in our inquiries about faith, will appear, if we add to the above considerations, that *all men have not faith*—that there is such a thing as a dead faith—a feigned faith, &c.—that, in reality, there is but *one faith* that will profit the soul. Yet if we attend to the prevailing cavils in the professing world about faith, it will not be wondered at, that men of sense, who have not the fear of God before their eyes, reject every system of religion as a mere farce, or that *deism* should so much prevail in our day. For while they behold *that faith*, which is in general acknowledged essential to salvation, made a matter of doubtful disputation ; by some made *anything*, by others *nothing* ; by a third class *every thing*, and by a fourth *worse than nothing*, they cannot think that *all* are right ; nor can they think it consistent to suppose, that the God of nature, the fountain of all intelligence, would give a revelation to his creatures that was altogether unintelligible ; and if persons were not led more by *fashion* and custom (for it is become rather indecent to be of no religion) in their religious profession, than solid reflection ;

tion; they would either reject all religion and commence Deists, or renounce the vain jangling of the professing world, and become Christians indeed, by receiving that truth which is able to save their souls. It remains therefore, that there is no consistent medium between antient apostolic christianity, and downright infidelity;—and accordingly, in strict truth, in his sight who searches the heart, there are but two sorts of men in Christendom; and at the day of judgment it will appear so to all the world. Now we are divided into a great variety of sects and parties, but *then* of all these sects and parties, there shall appear but two sorts of men; *believers*, and *unbelievers*. And then that most remarkable saying of Jesus Christ, will take effect, and be fulfilled, *He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* See Bellamy's Essay on the Gospel, p. 252.

SECTION I.

A general VIEW of the various NOTIONS and DEFINITIONS of FAITH.

FAITH, in the Scripture account of it, is a very simple intelligible thing. But as it is re-tailed out in the professing world, it is sometimes so cut and trimmed, so changed and metamorphosed, that it is hard to say, after all the definitions and directions that have been given, what it is, wherein it consists, or how it is to be performed! Some notice, however, may be taken of the names which have been given it, in some of its transmutations, though fully to explain their genuine import, our skill would fail us in attempting, 1. Tim. i, 6—7. Faith then, as it appears in human writings, has among several others, obtained the following epithets, viz. historical faith, temporary faith, the faith of reliance, the faith of assiance, the faith of application,

tion, the faith of approbation, the direct, the reflex, the recumbent, the courageous, the venturesome, and the triumphant acts of faith. It is also represented by some as having, and putting into action eyes, ears, mouth, arms, hands, fingers, legs, and feet.—To describe these various kinds of faith, and to give direction when each of these acts should be put forth, or which of these members should be exerted, has served to employ the time, talents, and ingenuity of many, though, after all, few of them, if any, have condescended to make it appear, how their notion of faith is consistent, either with the Scripture definition thereof, or the use of the term in common life. Fearing, therefore, lest I should get involved in a labyrinth of inextricable difficulties, should I attempt to explain the above terms, and indeed, not seeing what use my labors would be of had I talents to perform it, I shall leave that part of the work to those that have more time on their hands than I have, and whose reputation and interest may lie more in the use of them, than mine happens to do. However, a few of the most intelligent definitions that have been given may be considered.

First : it has been received as a common axiom, for the use of the weak and wavering, who nevertheless wish to think well of themselves in religious concerns, that the *desire* of grace, is grace ; and so, that the *desire* of faith, is faith. “ So if there be but a willing mind to this service it is accepted.”—Without doubt, where the true grace of God is known, there will be an earnest desire after its increase, it being a living principle in the soul. But surely this is a very unwarrantable way of proceeding, either in defining faith, or leading those who wish to know whether they have believed or not, to a fair trial. The human heart is deceitful above all things, and is ever ready to fancy what is most agreeable ; and indeed there are but few under a religious

ligious profession, but are ready to think, that they sincerely desire and endeavor to believe, though they are not *able* to perform their desire. Surely then we are not allowed to say, that *every desire* of faith is faith; this would be too vague. The desire then must be limited, and of course qualified. Without doubt it should be, in order to prove itself genuine, an humble, penitent, sincere, earnest, and affectionate desire. But there are some very material objections to this notion of faith; First: it leads those who think they have such a desire, to presume upon it. If a sense of guilt trouble the conscience, nothing but that which fairly atones for sin can effectually remove it. But sinners are naturally disaffected to the gospel hope, and would rather catch at any thing for present relief, than give up every good thought of themselves, and be relieved by that which is equally free for the profligate, as for the morally decent. To lead sinners therefore to take peace, or encouragement, from the workings of their own minds (which while in a state of nature, are nothing better than the working of pride) is to establish them in their enmity to the gospel hope; and this cannot be done without confirming them in presumption. Again: it tends to, and often actually does, involve those for whose relief it is intended, in greater distress, since it is told them that the desire must be *qualified*. The distressed soul is led to seek within himself, for the approved qualities of this desire; but finding so much of the world there, so many interruptions in his devotion, so many instances of deceit in his heart; &c. either he comes to a conclusion that he has not *such* a desire, or has it not to that degree, which it is thought necessary to have it, in order to constitute a *right* desire. This he sincerely laments; yet lives in sad suspense from day to day, waiting and praying, as he is encouraged, for this desire. Sometimes he thinks (especially under preaching) he has obtained it,

it, and *then* hope, joy, and comfort, begin to arise. Anon all these pleasing symptoms are cut down, dried up, and withered! then his life hangs in doubt, and were it not that he is told by his miserable comforters; that to sincerely lament these things is a token for good, his soul would be driven into black despair, unless it could obtain some temporary ease, by mingling again with the world. It needs not be told, at least to those who have had access to *class-meetings*, and meetings for relating experiences, how common this method of comforting them that mourn, is in our day. But ah! how foreign to the hope set before us in the gospel! In fact it is neither law nor gospel. Neither works nor grace. But a mere device of satan to blind the minds of them that believe not, 2. Cor. x. 12. For

Further: the thing itself is contrary to scripture and common sense. When a person says "I desire to believe," * nothing more pertinent can be replied
H than,

* What is here supposed, is a great mistake, and gross absurdity; even that men may sincerely chuse and desire those spiritual duties of love, acceptance, choice, rejection, &c. consisting in the exercise of the will itself, or in the disposition and inclination of the heart; and yet not be able to perform or exert them. This is absurd, because it supposes, that a man directly, properly and sincerely inclines to have an inclination, which at the same time is contrary to his inclination, and that is to suppose him not to be inclined to that, which he is inclined to. If a man, in the disposition and acts of his will and inclination does properly and directly fall in with those duties, he therein virtually performs them; for the duties themselves consist in that very thing, they consist in the state and acts of the will being so formed and directed. If the soul properly and sincerely falls in with a certain proposed act of will or choice, the soul therein makes that choice its own. Even as when a moving body falls in with a proposed direction of its motion, that is the same thing as to move in that direction.—That which is called a *desire* and *willingness* for those inward duties, in such as do not perform them, has respect to these duties only indirectly and remotely, and is improperly represented as a willingness for them; not only because it respects those good volitions only in a distant view, and with respect to future time; but also because evermore, not these things themselves, but something else, that is alien and foreign, is the object that terminates these volitions and desires.—*See Edwards on free will, p. 238.*

than, why then don't you believe? Does some sovereign power, some fatal necessity prevent you? Or have you a sincere desire to believe what God has said, only there is not sufficient evidence thereof; the salvation is desirable; but not sufficiently proved to be true? Rather, does not your unbelief proceed from ignorance, and a consequent disinclination to believe? Without doubt it does. But to convince of this is a work, which he only whose name is the ALMIGHTY can perform. Therefore is it said, by way of apology, that such *desire* to know the gospel. Then surely the nature, design and evidence of the gospel salvation should be laid before them, instead of putting them to pore upon their own hearts, in order to extract some kind of comfort from their supposed *desires*.

But, as before hinted, the plain fact is, the gospel hope is thought to be too weak to support them; and therefore this humble, sincere, earnest, and affectionate desire, is to believe, not in Christ alone, but that they are the children of the most High, the peculiar favorites of heaven. This desire therefore may be considered as an important struggle, between *conscience*, which bears witness that they *are not* the children of God, and which the holy Spirit in the word confirms—and the aspirations of their *pride*, under the influence of that ancient doctrine, *Ye shall be as gods*. Now as the *former* prevails, conviction, fear, shame and torment are the painful consequences. But when the *latter* gains the ascendancy, and so the conscience becomes blinded or seared thereby, then some kind of peace, joy and comfort are its attendants. But if such persons are, through divine teaching, mercifully brought to obtain peace by the blood of the Redeemer's cross; they will then perceive, that all their previous desires, prayers, resolutions and endeavors were not in reality after God's salvation; but aimed at *doing* or *feeling* something from which, or through which, their peace and hope might be derived. Once

Once more: the person who is seeking faith, or desiring to believe, must either be a believer or an unbeliever; for between these there is no consistent medium. He cannot be a believer; or else what he professes to believe, would give rest to his soul. *For we who have believed, do enter into rest*, and cease from those fruitless works, &c. He must therefore be an unbeliever: and *as such* is in a *carnal state*. But the carnal mind is enmity against God. Therefore, though it is natural enough, for one under the alarms of conscience sincerely to desire *peace*; it is neither scriptural nor rational to say, he desires to believe the truth of Christ, or is seeking faith in him. He does not understand or know what faith in Christ is; how then can he seek it? His heart rises in enmity when the pure gospel is preached;—how then can he desire it? Would it not much better become christian teachers, when they have to deal with such persons as those under consideration, to copy after the example of Christ in his treatment of the like characters? Matt. xix. 16—21. &c.

Faith has also been defined a *condition* of justification; or that act of the mind which God requires us to exert instead of obeying the whole law; and is frequently called obedience to the *new law*. This sentiment has been sufficiently exposed by those who have engaged in the Arminian controversies; and stands so much opposed to salvation by grace, that no one can receive it, but he whose mind is blinded by the god of this world, and who is under a strong delusion to believe a lie. It indeed comes under the specious recommendation of that doctrine, which would seem to wear the face of more than ordinary holiness; but is in fact an abominable Antinomian tenet, and aims at making void the law. As to faith, it is as foreign to the scripture view of it as darkness is to light. I shall therefore offer no other refutation of this notion, than Paul's words, Rom.

iv. 4, 5. *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

Again: it has been said that—"Faith is not simply the believing of any sentence that is written, or that can be thought upon!"—It is seldom expressed in these very words, though the same thing is to be understood, when we are told that—"Faith is a saving grace, implanted in the heart at regeneration (and must therefore be previous to understanding and believing the gospel) by the Spirit of God, and is a disposition or readiness in the human mind, to believe the gospel."—But this faith, whatever it be, cannot be the faith of the operation of God; because that comes by hearing the word of God. It is admitted, that unfeigned faith is a work of the Spirit, and that salvation is inseparably connected with it; yet scripture and common sense forbid us thinking, that faith can exist without a testimony. The absurdity of this notion, about a disposition in the mind towards the gospel, previous to a true understanding thereof, has been shown in the sixth Section of the first Essay.

By others faith has been defined, a belief that we have a right to salvation in preference to others—a belief that we are the elect of God—or a persuasion that Christ shed his blood for *me in particular*, or that I shall go to heaven, &c. That believers do come to a knowledge of their personal interest in Christ, and the things that they believe and hope in, is granted; and will be considered in its proper place. But it is most certain, that carnal men may and do embolden themselves, upon false notions, to use the most confident expressions about their personal interest in the favor of God. Such as, "I know so surely as that there is a God in heaven, that he is *my* God, and that I shall as surely go

go to heaven as if I were there," &c. Who more confident than the Pharisees ? they had no doubt of God being their father ; and yet, who more blind to the knowledge of the true God than they ? If it be faith, to believe our relation to God, to call ourselves *the dear people of his choice*, and appropriate all the blessings of eternal life to ourselves ; then the Pharisees had faith in a very eminent degree. But to suppose that faith consists in a firm persuasion of our own interest, is, in effect, the very same thing as to say, faith is a believing that we believe. To this it will be objected that wicked men, deceiving their own souls in believing a lie, is no argument against the appropriating act of faith upon the grant of the gospel. True, if that were all the ground of objection. But it wants evidence from scripture to support that notion, that God promises eternal life to *every bearer* of the gospel, or, which in fact is the same thing, that *every bearer* has a right to believe that Christ died for *him in particular*. It is granted that the gospel proclaims salvation *indefinitely*, and declares that *every believer* thereof shall be saved, and that *whosoever* believes on Christ, hath everlasting life ; yet it gives no ground for any one to assure himself in his first believing, that Christ and heaven are infallibly his. Every believer of the gospel is confident that whosoever believeth on Christ shall be saved, and that it may be said of every one who is saved that Christ loved him and gave himself for him *in particular*, while yet he is not confident that this is true of *himself*, because it remains to be proved that he *has* believed, and that it is *the gospel of Christ* which he does believe. And since it is not any thing, about ourselves that we are immediately called to believe, but the testimony that God has given of his Son ; our confidence, if it be that which the gospel produces, is not in ourselves, nor of the goodness of our state, but in the sufficiency of that salvation which the scriptures *indefinitely* proclaim. Besides,

some have rejoiced in the word of the gospel, who have afterwards revolted from their profession—many think they believe the truth who are at the same time holding some fatal delusion—and it is no where ascertained in the word of God, that Christ died for the actual transgressions of any person in particular. But the MYSTERY of this sort of faith is set before us in the following lines. “ Let it be well observed, that the reason why we are to assure ourselves in our faith, that God freely giveth Christ and his salvation to us particularly, is not, because it is a truth before we believe it, but because it becometh a certain truth when we believe it, and because it will never be true except we do, in some measure persuade and assure ourselves that it is so. We have no absolute promise or declaration in the scripture, that God certainly will or doth give Christ and his salvation to any one of us in particular; neither do we know it to be true already either by scripture, or sense, or reason, before we assure ourselves absolutely of it: yea, we are without Christ’s salvation at present, in a state of sin and misery, under the curse and wrath of God. Only I shall prove, that we are bound, by the command of God, thus to assure ourselves: and the scripture doth sufficiently warrant us, that we shall not deceive ourselves in believing a lie: but according to our faith, so shall it be to us. This is a strange kind of assurance, far different from ordinary kinds; and therefore no wonder if it should be found weak and imperfect, and difficult to be obtained, and assailed with many doubtings. We are concerned to believe other things on the clear evidence that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no; so that we cannot deny our assent without rebelling against the light of our senses, reason or conscience. But here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by the evidence of the things; but we must work it out in ourselves by the assistance of the

the Spirit of God, and thereby we bring our own thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. None but God can justly require of us this kind of assurance, because he only *callath those things that are not, as though they were*, he only can give existence to those things that yet are not, and make a thing to be true upon our believing it, that was not true before." *

It is acknowledged in the above citation, that there is no evidence, of any kind, that God gives Christ and his salvation to *any one in particular*, before we absolutely assure ourselves of it—that *this is not a truth before we believe it*, and moreover, *will never be true except we do persuade and assure ourselves that it is so*; but that which *was not true before, becometh a certain truth when we believe it!!!* Yet it is confessed this doctrine of faith will not hold good in any other things; for we are concerned to believe them *on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no*. To believe without evidence is not faith but fancy and presumption, whether the thing believed be human or divine. And it is most certain, that the very attempt to persuade persons to believe, without knowing what they are to believe, or without plain evidence that what they are called to believe is true, whether they believe it or no, would be hissed out of the world as an affront to common sense in any thing but religious matters: in which, grievous to think, nothing is too absurd to be propagated, or too ridiculous to be received!—Is it then, peculiar to the God of heaven, the source of intelligence, to set *falsehoods* before his creatures, to be transformed into

* Marshall's Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification, 8th Edit., page 173, 174.—The very singular nature of this quotation, will sufficiently apologize for receding from the method I have all along adopted of concealing the author's name from whom I have quoted. And unless I had referred to the book in which this *very deep* sentiment is maintained; I should have feared being suspected by some, of having fabricated it myself.

into *truths* by a confident belief of them, and to *bind* them by his command to perform the strange operation? Far be it from him! shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

I shall now conclude this general view of the various notions of faith in the professing world, with observing, that divine truth is always consistent with itself, and *evidence* is its inseparable characteristic; whereas falsehood wears many faces, and sets the invention of its propagator upon the rack to cover its hateful appearance with the mask of truth, in order to blind the understanding, fear the conscience, and delude the soul. Whether this appropriation therefore be supported by supposed qualifications—the imaginary “*deed of gift*”—or the courageous act of faith without evidence either from scripture, sense, or reason; it is most certainly, essentially different from believing the record that God has given of his Son.—So that however well pleased any may be, in a full persuasion that they have *exerted the appropriating act*, unless more solid evidence of their actual interest in Christ be given; their claim will, in the end, be found miserably deficient. And though persons may strain every nerve in laboring to believe that their state is good, or to make that true which is not true before they believe it; it will remain an unchanging truth that, *he that believeth not* (that very gospel which Christ and his Apostles preached) *shall be damned*.—Seeing then that there is but *one faith*, and that without *it* we cannot please God, acceptably worship him, or eternally enjoy him; and since those various and opposite notions of faith prevailing in the professing world, cannot all be right; it follows that there is danger of being deceived: this cautions us to inquire, wherein the very essence of the ONE FAITH consists; which when known, in obedience to the exhortation, we should contend earnestly for.

SECTION

S E C T I O N II.

On the FAITH of the Operation of GOD.

THE inquiry in this Section is, principally, wherein the nature of that faith consists which may with strict propriety be stiled *like precious* with the Apostles; and in order to avoid an error in the proposition, and so to prevent stumbling at the threshold, I shall rest satisfied with such a definition of it as the BIBLE affords. And surely, when the unerring Spirit of truth condescends to define, and to point out a line of illustration; it manifests much pride and ignorance in any one to swerve from it. Nor is it to be wondered that any who swerve from the scriptural definition, should also err from faith unfeigned, and turn aside to vain jangling.

According to that very accurate divine PAUL, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, Heb. xi. 1. Here then we are presented with a full, clear, and comprehensive definition of *gospel faith*: that faith which is of the operation of God, and without which we cannot please him. It consists of two parts, viz. *the truth believed*, which is the substance of things hoped for; and *the belief of the truth*, which is the evidence of things not seen. How plain, how rational, how worthy of the God of intelligence! We read nothing here of the direct, or the reflex acts, nor of making a falsehood truth, by confidently believing it. Here is nothing said of the personal appropriating act, neither is faith and its effects confounded.—But I shall proceed to consider a little more particularly, this truly excellent definition of the faith of God's elect, which the inspired Apostle has with plainness and clearness laid before all men.

First: *Faith is the substance of things hoped for*. The Bible exhibits one harmonious, consistent, beautiful system of truth. The whole of which, in all its glorious

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glorious parts, is only a transcript or copy of what was drawn out in the character of Jesus Christ: so that the truth as it is in him, or the doctrine of Christ in the scriptures, of which many summaries are given, contains the *sum* or *substance* of the whole compass of evangelical truth; and the hope which is laid up for the saints in heaven, is heard of in the word of the truth of the gospel, Col. i. 5. which is the substance of what things they expect hereafter, or the substantial foundation of their hope. Faith then, in the first part of the definition under consideration, evidently intends the *things* to be believed: and that the term is often used in this sense, in things human and divine, will appear by having reference to a few instances. Laws and treaties made and confirmed, betwixt one nation and another, are called the faith of those nations. To preserve them inviolably is called keeping the faith; and for either party to recede from, or break any of them, is called a breach of faith; and these laws, treaties, &c. are the substantial ground of hope and confidence to each nation. When a person has declared his sentiments upon any point, those things that he has testified of are properly called his creed, or his faith: and it is become very common to denominate such a declaration, *a confession of faith*. If the person professes his hope of salvation in the things he has held forth, then it is plain, that his faith is the substance of his hope; and the nature of his hope will be as his faith is. The term is frequently used in the Bible in this sense, as Rom. iii. 3. *Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?* Gal. i. 23. *The faith which he once destroyed*; and what the apostle preached was *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. In this sense it is used Gal. iii. 2. 5. 12. 23. 25. and nothing but the doctrine of Christ, which, by the writings of the prophets and apostles were delivered to them, could be intended when Jude v. 3. exhorts to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*.

Calvin

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Calvin in his Instit. B. 3. chap. 2. § 13. observes that, " Oftentimes faith signifies the sound doctrine of religion, as in the place that we now alledge. (1. Tim. i. 5) And in the same epistle Paul will have the deacons to *hold fast the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*—Again, when he publisheth the falling away of certain from the faith. But on the other side he saith, Timothy was nourished up with the *words of faith.* Again, where he saith that profane vanities and oppositions, falsely named sciences, are the cause that many depart from the faith : whom in another place he calleth reprobate touching faith. As again he chargeth Titus saying, warn them *that they may be found in the faith.* [By soundness he meaneth nothing else but purity of doctrine, which is easily corrupted, and brought out of kind by the lightness of men] Even because in Christ, whom faith possesseth, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Therefore faith is worthily extended to signify *the whole sum of heavenly doctrine from which it cannot be separated.*" †

There are many things spoken of in the sacred writings concerning faith, that must be understood in the above sense. As first : our resurrection from a death in trespasses and sins, Col. ii. 12. This cannot intend any act of the human mind, under any influence whatever, for, *of his own will begat he us by the word of truth.* Faith in this sense comes by hearing the word of God. But this shows how faith comes to us ; not how we approach to it. Our ears are not previously disposed to hearken : but the almighty

† One would think, that the greater part of those who call themselves *Calvinists*, are shamefully deficient in knowing where in Calvin's doctrine consists ; or should we find them maintaining the notion of faith being in the heart before we understand, receive, or even hear the word of God ? But it has happened to Calvinism, as it has long been with Christianity :—many are sound of the name, for the sake of credit, reputation, and interest, who yet are as ignorant of the doctrine, and as far from following the practices of the first Christians as an idolatrous Pagan.

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almighty voice of the Son of God goes forth and unstops the deaf ears. Even as he once said, to one literally deaf. *Be opened.* And straightway his ears were opened. But this sentiment has been considered in the former Essay.

Again: it is faith taken in this sense, that is the matter of *justification* before God, and in the sinner's conscience. No fact comes better established in the word of God, than that the matter of a sinner's justification, is the righteousness of Christ imputed. It is established firm as Jehovah's throne; nor can the deepest subtilties of hell move it. Yet we are expressly said to be justified *by faith*, Rom. v. 1. chap. iv. 3—9. and the divinity of men would teach us, tho' nothing can be more palpably absurd and dangerous, that faith justifies us *as an instrument*: and many by acting faith, as an instrument to their justification, are insensibly led, upon many occasions, to substitute these *acts of faith*, in the place of those *divine acts* which wrought out the all-sufficient righteousness. But if it be faith, as an instrument, that Abraham is said to be justified by, then it would seem that it is by the instrumentality of Abraham's faith that all his seed are justified! For it is the very same thing that justifies him, and his children, see Rom. iv. 3.—8. compared with verses 22—25. To the same signification are the following scriptures, Rom. iii. 38. Gal. ii. 16. Chap. iii. 24. It is what the sinner believes then, or the work of Christ alone, separate from all its effects, or fruits that justifies.—It has been very common to use the phrases “justifying faith,” and “saving faith,” And it is to be hoped many use them, without connecting any erroneous sentiment therewith. Yet it is plain others would be understood, that it is some peculiar *sort* or *manner* of believing that justifies. But if the heartiness, seriousness, or sincerity of our believing, have any influence whatever in our justification, it cannot be said to be *freely by grace thro' the redemption which is in Jesus.* Further:

Further: Faith in the sense under consideration is what believers *live* by, according as it is written, *The just shall live by his faith*. Some are apt to imagine that the vigorous actings of the soul are here intended. Such live (such a life as it is) by the workings of their own mind, which they call faith. But surely this is not the life of faith pointed to in the scripture; far otherwise. The soul that is spiritually quickened, lives a much nobler life than this. He lives by his faith it is true; but what is the believer's faith? undoubtedly Christ as he is revealed in the word. *He is our life*, Col. iii. 4. and, *This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am (says Christ) the living bread which came down from Heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world*. He, therefore, who lives by any thing else, whether his frames, feelings, his supposed humble breathings, holiness, sweet sensations, &c. is in the estimation of him who cannot err, *a dead sinner*. *Jesus said unto them verily verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, ye have NO LIFE IN YOU*, John vi. 53.

Once more: under this part of the definition, we are to conceive of faith sanctifying. *Acts. xxvi. 18. Sanctified by faith which is in me. Chap. xv. 9. Purifying their hearts by faith*. Nothing else can be intended but the truth believed, according to our Lord's prayer, *John xvii. 17. Sanctify them thro' thy truth: thy word is truth. Chap. xv. 3, Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you, 1. Cor. i. 30. Eph. v. 26*. Thus the precious truth as it is in Jesus, dwelling in the heart, produces every good disposition, and prompts to every good work. It dwells in the understanding, and enlightens it. It possesseth the conscience and purges it from dead works. It prevails in the will and disposes it to pray, *Father, thy will be done*. It en-

gages the affections, and regulates and influences them, and of course the outward conversation will be adorned with every good word and work. Such are the triumphs, and such the correspondent effects of divine truth in the soul.

The *second* part therefore of the apostles definition of faith, leads us to conceive of it as *The evidence of things not seen*. From hence it appears, that they who chuse to define faith a believing without evidence from scripture, sense, or reason; differ essentially from the apostle. Paul held no such crude notions. As a man of good sense, as a pupil of Gamaliel; and as a disciple of the Holy Ghost; he knew the absurdity of proposing any thing to be believed, without *evidence* of its existence and reality.

Equally absurd is their notion who, in order to appear more than ordinarily accurate, censure and solemnly condemn the idea, of believing being an act of the mind. It is acknowledged, indeed, that very unscriptural sentiments have prevailed about *acts of faith*, when they are supposed to arise from some previous principle, well disposing the mind of unbelievers towards the gospel. Yet, if it be admitted possible for the soul of man to *act* (and who will deny that it does?) there is nothing more properly an *act* of the mind, than believing a truth; in which first the mind perceives it; then considers the evidence offered to support it; and finally gives assent to it. And can this comport with inactivity? We must either say then, that the soul *acts* in believing the gospel; or that the soul is an inactive spirit, which is absurd.

No inquiries are of greater importance in treating upon faith than, *What is truth?* and, upon what *kind* of evidence is the truth to be received? In regard to the first Christ says, I AM THE TRUTH. And what he means by that, the new Testament is intended to illustrate: which has been considered in
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the former Essay.—As to the evidence upon which the truth is to be received, it might be observed in general, that evidence should always be of the same nature with what is proposed to be believed.—Are we to receive the gospel, because, or just as far as it is agreeable to reason? No: for then reason would be set up to inform us what God *ought* to say. And as what is called reason, wears an evil eye to the truth, it is not to be supposed that we can receive it in the love of it, upon this evidence. Are we then from some impressions upon the mind which are thought to be the convictions of the Holy Spirit? No: for then we should receive nothing from God, but what in *some certain way* or other, we feel impressed upon our minds. However many find it *convenient* to believe upon this kind of evidence; because then they can chuse what part of the word of God they like best: and readily avoid what is disagreeable to them, likely to injure their reputation among professors, or hurt their worldly interest. Are we upon the evidence, that the fathers, the church, the wise and learned, or the great and pious have produced? No: for then we should acknowledge masters upon earth, contrary to Christ's command: neither would this be hearing his voice, but the voice of the learned, the pious, &c. and would at best, be but "*human faith.*" Are we to receive the truth, upon the force of a philosophical argument, or a mathematical, or logical demonstration? By no means: for this kind of evidence is unsuitable to the nature of the testimony, which is not written in the words of man's wisdom.

The truth to be believed being *divine*, the evidence upon which it is received must be of the same nature. And *the gospel has its most proper evidence in itself.* The majesty which clothes the sacred pages evidently declares, that God himself speaks there. When the Spirit of truth opens the understanding, by the entrance of the word, to understand and know

the truth as it is in Jesus, the light, power, and evidence thereof produces a confidence in the same. We believe and are sure, because the faithful and true witness has spoken it, 1. John v. 10. and this certainty of soul, grounded upon unchanging veracity, is the evidence of things not seen. However as our knowledge of the gospel admits of degrees, so our faith may be denominated weak or strong, and we be styled, agreeable thereunto, babes, young men, or fathers in Christ. Believing then, whether the things believed are human or divine, is nothing more than a conviction of soul, that those things are true. This conviction is nothing more, than the force of satisfactory evidence. And this evidence, in the gospel, is in the things believed.

It has rather inconsiderately been said by some, that what we understand we cannot help believing: for this is not literally true. Two persons may equally understand the nature of a proposition, while the one receives it as true, and the other rejects it as false. I may clearly understand the error of my friend; but does it follow that I cannot help believing it? Yet it certainly is impossible, that we should understand a proposition to be true, and not believe it, whether the nature of the thing be agreeable or displeasing.—When it is said all faith supposes evidence, it is not to be understood, that every thing spoken of in the scripture is to be comprehended in all its parts, powers, and qualities, in an *absolute sense* before we believe it; or that we should reject what we cannot fathom. For then we must not only disbelieve that there is a God, but also every thing that necessarily belongs to him: yea, and ten thousand things in nature besides. We believe that God IS. But how he exists, our understandings were not framed to conceive of, nor are we called to believe. So there is sufficient evidence, both human and divine, that the scriptures are the word of God; though many sacred truths are only known

known in their nature and extent, to him who searches the deep things of God; for even Paul himself in the view of them, not being able to explore, cries out, *O the depth!* Yet it should be observed that, He who is perfectly wise, and cannot be deceived; faithful and good, and will not deceive his creatures; has revealed nothing but what is worthy of himself. He does not bind his intelligent creatures to believe real inconsistencies; for though the sublime truths are above human reason, they are not inconsistent with it.

But what evidence have we in the *true sayings of God*, of that which man believes for his salvation?

First: there is evidence of the *sufficiency* of Christ's work to save to the uttermost, the most guilty, the most polluted, and the most abandoned wretch on this side hell. This pleasing fact is confirmed in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, wherein the infinite dignity of his person, obedience, and sacrifice is demonstrated: for the declared import of this is, *That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* No person that calls this in question believes the gospel: yet every one does this, who disbelieves the sufficiency of the atonement to save him. Again: there is evidence of the *freeness* of this salvation. The report of it is spread amongst all nations, and directed to all sorts of persons without distinction. All its blessings are to be partaken of freely, as the bestowment of sovereign grace to the guilty sinner, *as such*. So that the rude Barbarian and the savage Scythian, have an equal right to partake of this salvation, with the Jew, the polite Greek, or the most decent Moralist. And when the evidence of the gospel strikes the mind, when a sinner is once convinced of the veracity of God—that the scriptures are his word—and that sinners *as such* are invited to partake of the benefits of grace freely; he will need nothing more to convince and

satisfy his soul, and cause him to believe on the name of the Son of God. He will not wait for any new revelation or assurance that God speaks to him; nor will he go about to *make* this truly believing it; what is written sufficiently satisfies him that *he* is not excluded. But if the indefinite extent of the gospel report be denied; (and this every one denies who excludes himself) the truth is called in question, and the common salvation is disbelieved.

Further: there is sufficient evidence in the dispensation of grace, that God in the distribution of his favors is just and merciful in perfection—that in the grand exhibition of mercy, through the obedience and atonement of Christ, his law is fulfilled, honored, magnified, and established as holy, just and good—sin is demonstrated to be an infinite evil—justice, in all its tremendous forms, a lovely attribute of Deity; and all his ways are founded in righteousness, holiness, and truth. To believe a gospel that does not set forth these things, is to believe a lie; and to manifest enmity against this gospel of the kingdom, is a full proof that such are *alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them*. But to believe the truth, in its glorious connection, is the sovereign gift of heaven; those on whom it is bestowed will not be heard saying, “My sins are too great to be pardoned;” because they believe upon unchanging authority, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseeth from *all* sin. Nor will they be distressed for want of something as a prerequisite, to distinguish them from the profane world, because they are persuaded that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the *chief* of sinners. Nor will they be perplexing themselves with fruitless fears, lest they should not be elected; because they know and believe that he is faithful and true, who hath said, that *Whoever believeth in him shall not perish; but have everlasting life*.

The believing view of this salvation, or rather The truth in the love of it, dwelling in us, begets every

reality do : and that " the greater part of mankind " slight the gospel way of salvation as weak and foolish, (among whom our objector must be ranked) or else think nothing at all about it : while others, professing that they know God in works deny him, and turn the grace of God into wantonness. And there are not wanting others who, while they profess to be saved by Christ, either in plain or more ambiguous terms and ways, establish their own righteousness. But can it be strictly said that either of these classes believe that very gospel which Christ and his apostles preached ? Rather, is it not manifest, that they are sporting themselves with their own deceptions, and that, if sovereign mercy does not prevent, by giving them to understand and know the Lord, they will perish in their delusions. It is readily acknowledged that many will *say* they " Believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord," &c. when in truth they do not believe *it*, but some false representation thereof which the god of this world has impressed upon their mind, to blind them, lest the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God should shine into them. It has been justly observed, that *most men*, who live under the dispensation of the gospel, do wofully deceive their own souls in this matter. They do *not believe* what they profess themselves to believe, and what they think they believe. Men talk of fundamental errors ; this is, to me, the most fundamental error that we can fall into. This mistake is in the foundation, and ruins the souls of those who die in it. Nothing is more common than for men to deceive themselves in this point, self-love, reputation among the religious, &c. makes them rest secure. Such will avoid the clear preaching of the truth, because if some of its light break in, it discovers their error, and fills them with torment—alas for them, for they have found out a way to go quickly down into the pit !

pit!—But still in whatever way it is supposed the objection has weight; it will remain a truth established forever that, HE THAT BELIEVETH SHALL BE SAVED.

“ But a person may have the clearest perception, and the most just views of the person and work of Christ in his *head*, who does not believe on him in his *heart*.” It is acknowledged that all who profess to know the Lord do not so in truth, John viii. 54; yet, *This is life eternal to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.* John xvii. 3. Such as know him are directed to glory only in this, Jer. ix. 24, and such are in a blessed state. Pf. lxxxix. 15. As to the above notion, it needs no other confutation, than for every thinking person to make the experiment, upon any point of knowledge that he has obtained; and I am of opinion that the greatest adepts in metaphysical subtilties, will find themselves puzzled to make out the distinction: though all will at once perceive that it is possible, yea, very common, for persons to *say* that with their *mouths*, which they do not understand or believe in their *hearts*; and, without doubt, this is what Paul would lead our thoughts to, Rom. x. 10. The faith of the operation of God is very different from every other kind of faith, but that difference does not consist in the *manner* of believing; but in the *nature* of the thing believed, and in the *evidence* which supports that belief; an hypocrite may have *feigned faith*, which from various motives, and to various ends he may see it prudent to retain; and many *very sincere* persons, in their way, may have a *false faith*, by which they may deceive themselves, and others: that is, they may believe a falsehood, or hold wrong notions of the truth. But then if they are *sincere*, it supposes that they believe it *with their hearts* to be true. There is no reason to doubt that there are many sincere Papists, Arians, Socinians, &c. who believe *in their hearts* that the doctrine which they se-

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verally profess, are true. Even as there were many *very sincere* in their opposition to Christ in the days of his flesh, and in the first preaching of the gospel, Acts xxvi. 9. Would it not then be talking more intelligible to say, that when a person's profession is not productive of suitable fruits, it is plain he is not taught of God, and so does not know the truth *as it is in Jesus*; than to make the above idle distinction, which is void of foundation either in scripture or common sense? Eph. iv. 20—24. 2. Peter i. 8—10.

“ But a person may believe the *doctrine* of Christ, who yet does not believe on the *person* of Christ.” It is true when faith relates simply to the existence of a person, the distinction is ever to be preserved. Many believe there were such persons as Paul, and James, who do not believe their doctrine. But this weighs on the contrary side to that on which the objection would place it, for it supposes a person may believe all that is written about Jesus Christ; and yet not believe *on him* or *in him*. But Christ says, Mat. x. 10. compared with Luke x. 16. *And how shall we believe in him of whom we have not heard?—So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* And what can we know of Christ, or what benefit can we receive from him but by and through his word? It is not the arrangement of letters or words of Scripture barely that we believe, but the mind and truth of God contained therein. There is no other use, therefore, for the distinction, than to entangle and perplex persons, and to promote and cherish some kind of blind enthusiasm.

“ But if faith is nothing more than a *simple belief of the truth*, it is only what Devils believe: and can the faith of Devils profit us?” such an objection as this coming from one whose person is held in admiration, will have much more influence upon the minds of his adherents (who without doubt hate every thing that they believe belongs to the Devil) than sound argument or positive scripture.—Those
who

who in attempting to answer this objection have pleaded that the Devils only believe that there is one God; not only leave the objection unanswered, but certainly have very limited notions of their creed. The apostle James plainly shows that their faith, in some respects, is more orthodox than that of many professors of religion, because the faith of the former produces terror and dreadful horror, while that of the latter leads to presumption, and awfully sears the conscience; nor have we any reason to believe otherwise, if scripture be our guide, than that Devils believe every gospel truth as firmly as the true believer does: and perhaps understand the nature of the truth much more extensively. But what does this avail *them*? Christ did not take upon him the nature of *Devils*. He did not become surety for, and bear the sins of *Devils*. Nor is it said to them, to *you* is the word of this salvation sent. No: unhappy creatures! they are, in awful sovereignty, though in strict justice, *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*, Jude, ver. 6. So that though they believe and confess with Peter, that Jesus is the Son of God, Luke iv. 34. 41. Mark iii. 11. Yet they *hate* the truth, knowing that for this purpose he was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, 1. John, 3. 8. Hence we find them crying out and saying, *Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God*, Mark i. 24. But though the saving truth torments Devils, it delivers sinners of the *human race* from the wrath to come. The Son of God clothed himself, in the human nature, and became the Surety of his people: and the language of Scripture is, *To you, O MEN, I call, and my voice is to the sons of MEN*. And whosoever among men believes what Devils do about the Son of God, are born of God, and shall be saved, 1. John, v. 1. Nevertheless there are not wanting those among the
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sions of men, who make no better use of what they know about the gospel than the Devils do; and who therefore, have no more benefit from it than they have. The Devils know the truth well: but they hate it—make use of every artifice to corrupt and pervert it, and bring forth fruits directly opposite to it. The Pharisees saw so much of the truth, as to hate it, speak evil of it, and seek to take Christ's life away, for bearing witness to it; and hereby manifested themselves to be the children of the Devil. John viii. 40. 44. And many in our day agree with Devils, to hate and pervert the truth, and persecute them that are of it: having seen so much of it as to be aware, that it does not suit their scheme of religion. Let us remember then, that the faith of Devils is this; to know so much of the truth as to join with them to hate and corrupt it; while the same truth known in its beautiful connection; believed in its native simplicity; and therefore received in the love of it, will save the soul, and promote a godly conversation. And it will appear plain to every one, who duly considers what the apostle James says, that he does not distinguish the faith of the operation of God from the faith of Devils, by the *nature* of the thing believed, but by its *fruits*; he plainly intimates, that if we separate *love and good works* from faith, as its certain and necessary concomitants, the Devils are as ORTHODOX as the most critical professor, James ii. 18—20. Chap. i. 22—27.

“But did not Simon Magus believe, who yet was a bad man?” True: but *what* did he believe? Is it replied, He believed the doctrine of Philip? without doubt he did in the sense in which he understood it. But who will say that he really *understood* the preaching of Philip? If then he did not understand that very gospel which was preached, but held it in a corrupt sense under a form of sound words; he cannot, with any degree of propriety,
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be said to have believed the gospel of Christ: for what we have no understanding of, we cannot believe, John ix. 35, 36. But that he did believe in *some sense* is true because the word asserts it, and it is very plain wherein his mistake lay. He had not received the evidence of the *freeness* of salvation by Jesus Christ, and was ignorant of the sovereign manner in which the blessings of it are bestowed. For he thought that the gift of the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money, Acts viii. 18—24. He wondered, like some professors now, at the discoveries which he had made, or the wonders which he beheld the apostles work: but did not understand the true grace of God. Their faith, therefore, should be classed with his, who think by their *doings*, or on the account of their sincere, earnest, motions of heart, &c. they are qualified for Christ; and so through the medium of these things *hope* for his mercy.

“But is there not such a thing as believing in vain?” 1. Cor. xv. 2. Yes: and to believe in vain is to believe something that is not true, and which therefore deceives us; to hold some error along with the truth, which tends to destroy its nature. As for instance. Those to whom the apostle wrote, believed that Christ was risen from the dead; and yet denied that there would be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust; and thereby overthrew the faith of some. The apostle shows that if this sentiment be true, that the dead rise not, the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection must of consequence fall; and so, their preaching would be vain, and the Corinthian’s faith would be vain, and they would be yet in their sins, 1. Cor. xv. 13, 14. Again: If we believe that salvation from sin and hell comes *only* by the death of Christ: and yet maintain that we obtain righteousness by our legal works, or become qualified for Christ by virtue of any thing exerted by us, or wrought in us under any name or
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pretence whatever; it is plain that we have believed in vain. For if righteousness come by the law; or if we can by any means shorten the distance betwixt God and us, and so begin to return to him—the great difficulty is over; we may easily proceed on our way; but in that case Christ has died in vain, and, of consequence, our faith in him is a vain thing.

“But is it not said that some believe only for a time?” Mat. xiii, 20, 21. True: and where shall we say their faith was defective, for that there was some fatal defect is manifest. But surely it was not in the manner of their believing; for there appears to have been approbation of their idea of the gospel—*delight* in it, and *dependance* upon it. And, in the appearance of things, they deserved to have been received, as those who had obtained *like precious faith* with the apostles. Yet, as before hinted, some where or other a mistake was made which, like a canker worm, at length eat away their zealous profession. Where then did this latent evil lie? Christ condescends to inform us; and therein points out a real difference between true faith, and its most subtle counterfeits that can possibly exist. *He that receiveth the seed into the good ground is he that beareth the word and UNDERSTANDETH it, which also beareth fruit and bringeth forth some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.* v. 2, 3. while the rest UN-
DERSTOOD it not, v. 19. On this account Jesus frequently inquires of his disciples, *Have ye understood these things?* After all the labored definitions and nice distinction, that have been given to distinguish a true faith from a false one, it appears from infallible truth, that the reason why any draw back to perdition, after many fair and flourishing appearances, is, because that under their profession they entertain some mistaken notions of the truth, and join somewhat of their own to it: so that though they may frequent the ordinances, talk in feeling

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feeling strains about their experiences, and profess much regard to many of Christ's sayings; yet some pernicious falsehood, lying at the root of their profession, they endure but for a while. But we ought not to have suspicion of this being the case with any, while they continue in a true profession of Christ, or while they apparently abide in him, and bring forth fruit. The example seems to have been recorded in order to prevent any, when they see these draw back, from supposing that true faith might be lost, 1. John, ii. 19. And to lead each professor to examine what kind of *faith* he holds, 2. Cor. xiii. 5. But when we perceive persons swerving from the form of sound words—courting the favor of the world to avoid the cross—declining in good works, and falling into enthusiastic fancies, or immoralities: we have sufficient ground to suspect, they have no root in themselves, and are withering away, 2. Peter ii. 1, 20, 21, 22, Heb. vi. 4—6, chap. x. 26, 27, 38. There are various instances of persons, making as clear profession of the truth as *words* can well express, who yet (as is the case with the Antinomians) do not understand that the Lord is a jealous God—that his holy law, so far from being abolished by the gospel, is honored and magnified by the Surety's obedience, and established as a rule of duty to them*; and it is to be feared that the principal reason, why some cavil at the law being a rule of conduct to believers, is, because it forbids and condemns what their carnal appetites approve. The clearness of the profession—the uprightness of the conversation—obedience to Christ's commands and ordinances, and enduring therein unto the end, are the scripture criterions of true faith.

“Is it the *duty* of *all* who hear the gospel to believe it?” If the intention of this inquiry be,

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* See the Death of Legal Hope, the Life of Evangelical Obedience, by Mr. A. Booth, p. 130—160.

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Ought every hearer of the gospel to believe that he is elected—that Christ shed his blood for him in particular, or that he shall certainly go to heaven? we must reply in the negative; because these things are not true of all. So that if it were the duty of all to believe them, it would be their duty to believe the most palpable falsehoods. If the design of the question be to know whether the belief of the gospel is enjoined upon us, and recommended to us as the law is, viz. *That the man that doth these things shall live*; it must be answered, No: for if any exertions of body or mind are required to that end, Christ has died in vain. But if the inquiry be whether it is the duty of every hearer of the gospel, to believe the record that God has given of his Son; that he is well pleased in him, and gives eternal life to as many as believe in his name—that he is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, and that there is redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace, for those who are inexcusably criminal. It is most certainly every one's *duty*, who hears these things, to believe them: and that for the following reasons.

(1st) There is nothing in the gospel message, but what men are *capable* of believing and observing, *if they choose it*. As there is nothing which men more tenaciously retain, than a good opinion of their own disposition to do well, if they were disentangled from certain things, situations, circumstances, &c. so their deficiencies are generally attributed to the want of power or ability: which ultimately throws the blame upon God, and makes him the author of sin. If the Lord required that of us which is *naturally* impossible to be performed, however willing we might be to the service, the case would be hard indeed with us! But is this the case? far be such a thought from us: far be such a thing from the Judge of **all** the earth. The scripture
true

ture plainly shows, that *naturally* man is as *able* as he is *willing*, to do the will of God. There is no *natural inability* in man to believe the gospel, otherwise it would not be criminal in him to reject it; any more than it is sin in the deaf not to hear, or in the blind not to see, or in the lame not to walk. If a defect in the natural capacities were criminal, then the more ignorant part of mankind would be the greatest sinners; and they who had an assemblage of brilliant parts would be the highest saints. But then it is urged that the scripture represents man as utterly unable to understand, receive or delight in the gospel. As that *no man can come unto me*, John vi. 44. The world *CANNOT* receive. John xiv. 17. ch. viii. 43. Rom. viii. 7. All this, and whatever else can be urged of the same nature, is admitted. But then, most certainly, this *necessity* is nothing more than *DISINCLINATION*. There is no lack of natural abilities: sinners can love, delight in, and practice sin: and if they *WOULD*—if they had not a prevailing inclination to the contrary—a deep rooted enmity to God, there is nothing that would hinder them, from loving him, and obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But unbelief and disobedience suits their inclination better: and men, as free agents choose what is most agreeable to them. So that the unbelieving and disobedient are not *compelled*, by some extrinsic necessity, to follow their pernicious and destructive courses: but they do it by voluntary choice, as that which is most agreeable, and seems most convenient to them. Hence Jer. xlv. 16. *We will not hearken unto thee*. Psal. lxxxii. 11. But my people *would not* hearken to my voice. Job xxii. 17. Mat. xxiii. 37. John v. 40. To repent and believe, to love and obey therefore, cannot be what men *would* do, but *cannot*; for the natural man, if he would speak out the language of his soul, its meaning would be this, “ I have no inclination to love

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God and keep his commandments. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life suit my inclination better, and them I freely chuse, voluntarily indulge, and delight in.

2dly. If it be not the duty of every one who hears the gospel to believe it; unbelief cannot be their sin. But unbelief is deemed a sin, so enormous in its own nature, and so dishonoring to God in its consequences, that condemnation is passed upon it in the divine word, John iii. 18, 36. It must therefore be their duty to believe the gospel. If it be not the duty of all who hear the truth preached, to believe and receive so glorious a revelation of God's love, then it can be no crime to break the first and great commandment. But nothing is more plain in scripture, than that every intelligent creature is under infinite obligations, to love the Lord with all his heart. To disbelieve and reject the gospel must therefore be an evil; and if it be an infinite evil, to disobey and reject the truth, and have pleasure in unrighteousness, then of course we are under infinite obligations to believe. If we are not bound in duty to believe the gospel; are we under any obligation to believe *any part* of God's word? and if so, what part? if not; then we are under no obligation at all, to observe any one thing that is commanded therein—Deism, of consequence, is no crime: and Christianity a mere farce!

3dly. To believe the gospel is the *commandment* of the everlasting God, 1. John iii. 23. Rom. xvi. 25, 26. John xii. 50. Mark i. 15; and therefore demands our implicit obedience. And if the command, exhortation, and invitation of God do not bind the conscience, and enforce obedience, what does?

Since therefore it is nothing but man's own DISINCLINATION, that prevents his believing; since unbelief is a sin deserving damnation; and since it is the commandment of the everlasting God, that
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men should repent and believe the gospel; it follows of course, that to believe the gospel must be the duty of every person who hears it. This then, I hope, being settled, I conclude this Section with the following question:—"What are we to understand by the assurance, and the full assurance of faith?" It has in general been taken for a confidence of personal interest in Christ; but this goes upon the supposition that faith is a persuasion that Christ loved me and gave himself for me in particular; which, as hath been shown, is not the faith of the gospel. Numbers have arrived at the full assurance of their election, &c. who yet have not obtained like precious faith with the apostles; and whose assurance therefore is built upon a false foundation, and is nothing better than self conceit and sad delusion. The faith of the operation of God is believing the record, testimony, witness, or evidence, that God has given of his Son, 1. John, v. 9—13. John iii. 33. Heb. xi. 1. The full assurance of faith, then, must be, a more enlarged acquaintance with, and confidence in *The truth as it is in Jesus*, Rom. iv. 19, 20. Luke i. 1. John vi. 69. Heb. x. 22. This is promoted by growing up into all riches of the full assurance of understanding, Col. ii. 2. And as faith grows in proportion to the increase of our knowledge of the truth; so also, it becomes much confirmed, through the experimental enjoyment thereof; and as we grow up, unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding in the truth, and enjoy pleasure in the blessed experience of it; so will our obedience prove, that our faith is not dead, and in this way we shall come to know our personal union with, and interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. For when we can assert with the apostle Paul, *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God* (we may with great propriety add) *who loved me and gave himself for me.*

ESSAY III.

ON EXPERIENCE.

INTRODUCTION.

CHRISTIANITY is far from consisting in mere speculation: it has immediately to do with the understanding, will, conscience, affections, and conversation. So that no person can have any substantial proof that he is a believer, unless he enjoys, in some measure, the inward, powerful experience, of those truths that he professes to believe, as their genuine and necessary effects. Of all errors therefore in a profession of Christianity, *that* is the most dangerous in its consequences, which supposes a person may understand, believe and trust in the gospel of Christ, and yet have no experience of the reality and efficacy of it. This surely is to have a form of godliness, while the power thereof is practically denied.

But the many abounding errors about the nature of gospel experience, and the use that should be made of it, warns us to proceed cautiously in our inquiries about it. "A vast deal of what, now-a-days, goes by the name of christian-experience, is very delusive, consisting of whims, flights and raptures, engendered by the warmth of animal passions, without one spark of grace. Accordingly, we have often seen these vain-glorious paraders, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, bluster for a time and then vanish into emptiness." Yet vain and delusive as these imaginations are, it is but too manifest that many who pass for orthodox christians in our day, have no better a reason of their hope, than "Thus I have been affected &c. and therefore I hope". Whence conclusions are drawn just as fancy dictates.

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Here it will not be amiss, briefly to glance at the true cause of the various mistakes about religion in general, and experience in particular.—We are taught in the word of God, that while man retained his original rectitude, he beheld his Maker's glory in the works of creation; and worshiped him with purity of affection, as far as God had made himself manifest in those visible objects. Moreover, man was framed to hear his Sovereign's voice and obey it; and that he might know, that his happiness depended upon his hearing and obeying the word of God: that to obey was life, and to transgress, death; a test of his loyalty and dependance was given him, when he was placed in Paradise, Gen. ii. 16. 17.—His understanding being clear, his will under subjection to the divine word, and his affections pure; his enjoyment, or experience of what he knew and believed, was a pure stream of felicity, flowing from the fountain of happiness itself. But *human nature* being corrupted by the poison of the serpent, that first apostate from holiness, being infused into it, man became vain, foolish, and disobedient. That *human nature* is corrupted, I take for granted, rather than set myself formally to prove: not for want of evidence to demonstrate the awful fact; but because it is too stubbornly supported by scripture and experience, to be denied with any tolerable show of truth; and notwithstanding some may find themselves disposed to maintain, *the dignity of human nature*, by substituting the flowers of rhetoric, or mere romance, in the place of evidence; the streams will indubitably prove the true qualities of the fountain, Mark vii. 20, 23.

Man's safety and happiness lay in his dependance on, and obedience to the *word* of his Maker; and therefore, the seducer's grand aim, was to draw him off from that; which we find he went about to do, by representing to him, that God withheld something from him, which if enjoyed would greatly add to his

his felicity; and to gild the fatal snare, perverted the divine word; which scheme but too well answered his design. Hereby he robbed man of the principle of truth, and so of the divine image, and of course of his safety and happiness. The false doctrines of Satan, *ye shall not surely die, and ye shall be as gods*, having entered into, and corrupted the mind, the enemy thereby drew his own hateful image, consisting of pride, enmity, and deceit upon him. This is the sad source of all that irregularity, both in the powers of body and mind, that daily experience manifests, and of all that atheism, idolatry and ungodliness, which so awfully prevail in the world. In consequence of this, it is become natural for man to sin with hope of impunity, and to seek happiness independent of God. If then we do but consider, what principles man is naturally under the dominion of, if we but reflect that his understanding is *darkness*, through the ignorance that is in him, the will *enmity*, and every affection disordered and defiled; and moreover, that man voluntarily gives up himself, to be led by the spirit of *error and self-dependance*, we shall see the true cause of the various branches of idolatry, and shall be able to account for all that self-flattery, self-exaltation, and self-confidence, which men are so prone to: nor shall we wonder, that the experience of many, under a profession of religion, is legal, enthusiastic, or even diabolical. The corruption of human nature, and the lead which the spirit of error takes in directing the mind in religious concerns, are the two grand sources of all error and delusion. But it should also be observed, that satan, in all ages, has had his agents among men, who have industriously propagated his doctrinal tares, and thereby, while they have sealed their own destruction, have promoted that of their fellow creatures. Such our Lord stiles *blind guides, and leaders of the blind*, and warns his disciples to take care of them, because their *delusions*

lusions would be so strong as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. The apostles point them out, (especially in the Epistles of Peter and Jude, and also in the Revelations) as the worst of enemies to mankind. We are informed that *many* would follow their pernicious ways, in consequence of which, such different sorts of churches would be framed, from those which were gathered by the influence of the apostles doctrine, that they would be governed by different rules, and united by different principles from what the first churches were. Such agree to give their power to the *beast*, and support the kingdom of the *destroyer*: for however shocking it might appear, there is scarce any thing in which people are so willing to deceive and be deceived, as in their eternal concerns! This the Lord by the Prophet complains of, Jer. v. 30. 31. *A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land, the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and the people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?* This observation to persons famous for a liberal way of thinking, may seem exceedingly uncharitable; but we have seen that he who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has declared that so it is. Nor was this *horrible thing* confined to Jeremiah's day: our Lord and his apostles, as above hinted, bid us expect such things, even under the strictest pretensions to Christianity, and to guard against *the cunning craftiness of men, who lie in wait to deceive*, and who PRIVILY would bring in damnable heresies, Eph. iv. 14. 2. Peter, ii. 1. But the Protestant reformed churches are ready to imagine that error, deception, &c. are confined to ROME, and some few *schismatics*, while Protestant dissenters maintain that error and delusion are inseparable with national churches: the very *constitution* of them being antisciptural; and each party thinks every other sect is tainted with heterodoxy, but themselves; when alas! false joys, arising from false confidence,

fidence, are but too manifestly amongst the various professions of our day, which should lead every man, in the first place, to suspect *himself*, and then, to look with a jealous eye on all making pretensions to christianity about him. Yet there have gone forth such abundant effusions of the spirit of *catholic charity*, that nothing is deemed more rude, than to intimate the least suspicion of our neighbor's creed being sound, and therefore, nothing more generally censured as bigotry, party spirit, and a narrow way of thinking. But strange to tell, though undeniably true the fact, this same *catholic charity* has it in her nature (happy for the friends of Jesus that it is not at present in her power) to persecute unto strange cities, and even unto death, those who dare refuse subscription to her dogmas! Though the above representations are nothing more than the scripture foretels, the writer of these Essays is far from thinking, that every one who is in error, and rejoicing in a thing of nought is intentionally striving to deceive. Far be any such thought from him. No: It is to be lamented that many sincere persons are ignorantly led astray; and even some who are born of God, in their infantile state, may be in bondage to the rudiments of this world, *not knowing the depths of satan*. There are also *degrees* in christian experience, even as there are in knowledge and faith: for, *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. Though it should be carefully observed, that even the *new-born babe* desires the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby; and so, the breathings of the heaven-born babe, are *essentially* and *visibly* different from the swelling imaginations of the flesh, which are manifested in a certain kind of canting, whining, voluntary humility. In *fine*, the smallest degree of real gospel experience is, in its nature, foundation, and effects, not only distinct from, but directly opposite to, that which goes under the borrowed name of christian-

christian-experience; but which, in fact, is nothing more than the fluctuation of the passions, generally set in motion by some enthusiastic rant, and is without foundation either in scripture, sense, or reason—a mere castle in the air!

S E C T I O N I.

Wherein some kinds of DELUSIVE EXPERIENCES, and the Use made of them, are laid open and exposed.

THE pleasure and satisfaction persons take, in reflecting upon the advances they have made towards the ports of bliss, according to their respective schemes of religion, and the influence this has upon their conduct, may be termed their *experience*. Not to enlarge upon the experience of the Pagan, the Mahometan, the Jew, or the Papist, who have all enjoyments suitable to the nature of their own creed; I shall briefly notice that kind of experience, which is talked of amongst Protestants.

First: Since the *nations* of the world have been denominated *christian*, it has been no uncommon thing to find those who renounce the scripture as idle fiction, bearing the christian name. Such however have a scheme of religion, and of consequence have *experience* suitable thereto. Their scheme may be briefly summed up thus: The notices of God and reason, which all men by the light of nature have, or at least may have; by the mere improvement of their natural abilities, *without revelation*, are sufficient to direct them in the way to eternal blessedness—satisfy them that such a state is attainable—and point out the way how it is to be obtained; so that by a practical compliance with these *notices*, which man in his present state is capable of, he may certainly attain to acceptance with God, please him, and obtain eternal happiness.—So much for the doctrine. Now for the

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corresponding experience, which may be had in the words of one of this class, who, in describing some christians of his own stamp, says, "They hearken to the great IMMANUEL within, the word and voice of everlasting reason, and are as blessed and happy as creatures can be, by the redeeming power of the HOLY JESUS." It is most certain that by the phrases "Immanuel, and the holy Jesus," the "word and voice of everlasting reason" is intended. It is plain also that there is no other reason for using these scripture phrases, than to throw a dash of popularity into their system: in order to make it more agreeable to those, who may yet find some scruples of conscience which make them unwilling entirely to give up revelation.—Now though it is true, that by the notices of God in his works, Rom. i. 20. and the reasonableness of doing to others, as we think it right they should do unto us, Rom. ii. 14, 15. we are taught our duty to God and our neighbor; and though this knowledge is sufficient for every man to find himself guilty by, and so to stand in need of some other revelation of God to give peace to his conscience, and make him happy for ever; yet nothing but some pernicious falsehood can teach the guilty to hope for eternal happiness, separate from that which takes away sin, and gives a title to everlasting life. But if any thing else can, there is no cause, why "the word and voice of everlasting reason" should not make us as blessed and happy as creatures can be. However, it needs but little discernment in the scriptures to understand, that the sense connected with these phrases, in the experience before us, is foreign to the sense of them there; and that the experience itself is nothing better than a mere phantasm.

Again: we have already considered the doctrine of those who seek their maker's favor, *as it were by the deeds of the law*, and have pointed out the falsity and delusion thereof, Essay I. Sect. IV. The experience

perience arising from it, is that dignity and self-enjoyment, which a consciousness of their sincere obedience, and the progress they make in that ancient doctrine, *ye shall be as Gods*, yields them. But things always are as their foundation be. The ground of the doctrine being falsehood and deceit, the experience must be nothing better than a miserable delusion, and the pleasure supported in the soul by it, equally criminal with the indulgence of any fleshly lust, and much more dangerous.

Further : there are other professing christians, whose doctrine and experiences are of a more *spiritual* nature than the former, who are much more concerned about cultivating *the devout exercises of the heart*, than performing the *externals* of religion. The doctrine of this class of professors, is not a very material circumstance even among themselves ; for they can readily agree to differ about *that*, provided they are of one mind in what are reckoned *essentials*. Indeed the *most spiritual* of this class find no occasion for any external revelation ; but this notion is now become more out of repute than it was a century ago. However they generally agree in this, that the word of God is a *dead letter*—that its doctrines are *dry*—and that to insist much upon them, leads, at least to *speculative* Antinomianism. In short : the doctrines of the word being looked upon as mere *shells*, their language is “ away with doctrines and give us a spiritual frame, a warm heart, and comfortable feelings ; you are for a Christ without, we are for a Christ within ; you are for doctrine, we are for experience.”—Now if this warm heart, spiritual frame, and so on, is promoted, whether it be by *bodily sensations*, a *dream*, some *impressions on the imagination*, or by the force and energy of what is called a *powerful preacher* ; they account that they are alive to God, and are eminently influenced by his Spirit. They have somehow got a notion, that something spiritual enters into the

nature of christianity, but being in a natural estate, they understand not the things of the Spirit of God, 1. Cor. ii. 14. Alas for them! their wretched fits of affection begin in *self*, tend to exalt *self*, and end in *self-feeding*, if not in *self adoration*. The foundation of all such experience is gross ignorance, supported by the mere agitation of corrupted nature, or the strong delusions of the devil; and to attribute these things to the work of the Spirit of God, is in fact to take the name of the Lord in vain. But I shall produce a specimen of these kinds of experience.

As to those which arise from bodily sensations a certain author has thus expressed himself, "There are some instances of persons, in whom it seems manifest, that the first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation. The animal spirits, by some cause, (and probably sometimes by the devil) are suddenly and unaccountably put into a very agreeable motion, causing persons to feel pleasantly in their bodies; the animal spirits are put into such a motion as is wont to be connected with the exhilaration of the mind; and the soul, by the laws of the union of soul and body, hence feels pleasure. The motion of the animal spirits does not first arise from any affection or apprehension of the mind whatsoever, but the very first thing that is felt, is an exhilaration of the animal spirits, and a pleasing external sensation, it may be in their breasts. Hence through ignorance, the person being surprised, begins to think, surely this is the Holy Ghost coming into him. And then the mind begins to be affected and raised; there is first great joy, and then many other affections, in a very tumultuous manner, putting all nature, both body and mind, into a mighty ruffle." Instances of this sort of experiences might be seen in abundance, amongst the *Jumpers* in Wales, or in certain select experiences and journals, which have been published
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to the world. Query : Are not these kind of experiences much promoted by the new mode of conducting the psalmody in certain places of worship ? And if so, might we not obtain as *rich experience* in a Play-house, or at a Concert ?

Again : the chief and most satisfactory experiences of some arise from *dreams*, and I have known this kind of (to use their own phrase) “ precious experience,” received with great applause, when the *dreamer* has requested church-fellowship, which, by the way, is a proof that the bond of union amongst such societies, is a *mutual good opinion* of each others experience, and not the faith which was once delivered to the saints.—It is hardly to be told what *terrible* and what *pleasing* experiences come from this quarter. Some hereby have been driven to their wits end : while others have been soaring almost into the habitations of the blessed : and have been ready to imagine themselves enthroned in bliss above ; when, to their sad mortification, they awoke and behold it was a dream ! Eccl. v. 7. Isaiah, xxix. 8. However, the extasies and raptures which it occasioned, frequently gave strength for many days afterwards.

Further : these “ warm hearts,” and “ comfortable feelings,” frequently arise from impressions upon the imagination. Here I shall again lay before the reader the words of the author above referred to, who expresses himself accurately on this head. “ The imagination is that power of the mind, whereby it can have a conception or idea of things of an external or outward nature, when those things are not present, and be not perceived by the senses. It is called imagination from the word *image* ; because thereby a person can have an image of some external thing in his mind, when that thing is not present in reality, nor any thing like it.—When such ideas are strongly impressed upon the mind, and the image of them in the mind is very
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lively, almost as if one saw them, or heard them, &c. that is called an *impression on the imagination*. Many who have had such things; have very ignorantly supposed them to be of the nature of spiritual discoveries. Some have had impressed upon them ideas of a great outward light, which they call a sight of God's glory. Some have had imaginary ideas of Christ hanging on the cross; with his hands and feet extended, and the blood streaming from his riven side; which they term a spiritual discovery of Christ crucified, and of the way of salvation through his blood. Some have had lively ideas of heaven, and of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, with the shining ranks of angels and arch-angels bowing before him, which they think is like what Stephen enjoyed, when he saw heaven opened, &c. Some have had, time after time, lively ideas of a person of a beautiful countenance, (somewhat like the representations of cherubs at the altar in churches) smiling upon them; which they account a spiritual discovery of a reconciled God, and a manifestation of the love of Jesus to their soul. To such it is a sufficient evidence that these things are *spiritual discoveries*, and that they see them *spiritually*, that they do not see them with the external organs of sight, but in their hearts. For they can see them when their eyes are shut. In like manner the imagination of some has been impressed with ideas of the sense of hearing. They have had ideas of words, as if they were spoken to them; sometimes they are the words of scripture, and sometimes other words. These they term having the inward call of Christ—hearing his voice in their hearts,* having the inward witness of his spirit—and the inward testimony of the love of Christ; and so on. From these impressions, these imaginary ideas, they conclude,

* Some such notion as this must be maintained, to countenance the silly distinction of believing in the *head*, and believing in the *heart*.

conclude, as indeed they are taught by their leaders, so to do; that the good work is begun in them—that they are the dear people of God's love; and that these experiences are the foretastes of heaven! and the heat of their passions, so intoxicates their soul; that one may as soon expect to gain the attention of a company of drunkards to a lecture upon sobriety, as to have theirs; while we expostulate with them about their delusions. It might be truly said, they feed on ashes: and a deceived heart has turned them aside; and, what is truly lamentable, these unhappy souls; instead of watching against these enthusiasms, lay themselves open to them; yea, they even pray for them, and when, after their absence, they have been renewed, it is taken for granted that God has heard their prayer; and this affects them more, and confirms them the stronger in their delusion. Now that these things are spiritual discoveries; of some kind, is readily admitted, but that they are the teachings of the Spirit of God, divine illuminations, or in any sense whatsoever proceeding from God, must be denied, so long as we retain the least veneration for him. All divine illumination conveys *instruction*. The Spirit of truth testifies of Jesus, and in all his operations makes use of the written word, by which he opens the understanding. But the hope and experiences of the persons above referred to would not in the least be injured, if infidels could prove the scriptures to be a cunningly devised fable. If then, these enthusiastic reveries must be called spiritual discoveries, they are fitly denominated by the scripture phrase, *spiritual wickedness in high places*.

Once more: under this sort of experience, may be ranked those extasies of the mind, that are engendered by the solemn tone, earnest zeal, and blustering vociferation of those who are, by these persons, called experimental preachers. The principal attention of these leaders is to produce, what is most likely

likely to influence the passions, work upon the imagination, and wind up the affections into lively frames, raptures and extasies; which, in order to make some show of gospel, they have the daring profaneness to call by the most sacred names. Hence we have been told, in writings almost universally admired, that "Whoever, upon an impartial examination can find certain marks upon them, viz. a spirit of prayer—not committing sin—conquest over the world—loving one another, and loving our enemies, may be as certain as though an angel from heaven was to tell him his pardon is sealed in heaven.—These are infallible marks; these are IMMANUEL, God in and with us; these make up the *white stone*; these are the *earnest* of the heavenly inheritance: in short these are glory begun, and are that *good thing*, that *better part*, which neither men nor devils, shall ever be able to take from us." Now there is no reason why a *free-thinker* may not as well use the terms *Immanuel*, and the *holy Jesus*, when he applies them to the "Word and voice of everlasting reason," as those, who profess to be shocked at the thought of deism prevailing, when they apply them to the imagination of the thoughts of their heart, under the influence of bodily sensations, dreams, impressions upon the imagination, or the influences of the passions under the powerful vociferation of a modern declaimer. Nor would the *nature* of these experiences be in the least injured, if the name should be changed from "Immanuel God in and with us" to the term *spirit*, or the *light within*, which is the great arcanum of the Quakers. Or were they to agree with the antient Pythagoreans among the heathen; to call these inward movements "A divine afflatus." But to renounce scripture *name* and *thing* would never preserve the credit of these pretenders to christianity.—The ebbings and flowings of these things are called christian-experience: their *absence* is termed desertion, or the hiding of God's face; and

and their *present* communion with God. Nothing can be more applicable to this class of professors, than the word of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, lxvi. 3, 4. chap. l. 10. *Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spoke they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.—Therefore, behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This ye shall have of mine hands YE SHALL LIE DOWN IN SORROW.*

Again: there are others, who in their studied confessions of faith, profess to depend for life and salvation upon Jesus Christ, and to be governed in their faith and practices by his word alone: among whom nevertheless there is much *cheff* which if it were winnowed away, would be no great loss. The experience of such might be considered as arising, either from some parts of scripture coming *suddenly* to their mind—from the appearance of the supposed principle of grace, or from what is generally called the assurance of faith. Without doing ourselves about order, or the choice of words; some general attention may be given to these things as they appear in the professing world.

It is acknowledged that all genuine experience does proceed from the word of God: and those experiences which are agreeable to the gospel cannot but be true. But the error here intended to be pointed out, is that remanence discovered in professors, if they are in any way affected by a passage of scripture, to conclude that it must come from God: it must be true gospel experience, and therefore cannot deceive them. Such in relating what they call “The Lord’s gracious dealings with them” will say, “There were such and such sweet promises brought to my mind: they came suddenly as if they were

were spoken to me : I had no hand in bringing such texts to my mind. I was not even thinking of any thing leading to them ; they came all at once so that I was surprized. I had not thought of them a long time before ; I did not know at first that they were scripture ; but they came with such power, that I was overwhelmed with joy, the tears flowed in great abundance, and I was filled with joy and peace in believing." Here let it be observed, that if any scripture comes to the mind, whether suddenly or more gradually, as the effect of the Spirit's work, and gives instruction and support, the effects are, without doubt, genuine gospel experience. But what is here objected to shall be instanced in a few particulars.

If a person (whose hope is placed in his awakenings, his convictions, or his experiences, be they of what kind so ever they may) should be in great distress, from the fearful apprehension that his hope is vain, and that he is still in his sins : and his distress heightened, by the near prospect of death's approach ; should on a sudden have, Hab. iii. 3. darted into his mind—If from hence he should, by the vision, understand the return of his former experience or joys—that the time for his comforts in this way are fixed, and so it becomes him to wait without them till they come, under the persuasion that they will shortly be here. And if following this, Isaiah liv. 7, 8. should be suggested and applied to the same purpose ; from which hope is revived, fear prevented, and comfort, in some measure, restored, in the thought that he shall *some time* be comforted again. It is very plain the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with any part of this ; and it is as plain, that the hope founded upon it, and the comfort taken from it are vain and delusive ; for the *sense* in which the passages are understood, is contrary to the true meaning of the Spirit of truth in those places. It is making a new meaning to the text ; a meaning too which God never

never designed, and is in fact the same as making a new BIBLE; which is not the work of the Spirit of God. Besides; there is no comfort that comes from God to guilty sinners, but what comes through Christ, his righteousness, and his atonement. But to take comfort, under a sense of having done wrong, from a persuasion that we are different from others, and from what we once were; is not the hope set before us in the gospel. To suppose, therefore, that God would comfort any by such means, is to suppose that he delights in sinners out of his Son: and that he can comfort them in believing a lie: than which, a greater absurdity cannot be invented.

Again: if a person prays earnestly to the Lord to direct him in the way of Providence, when, we will suppose there are two or more ways before him, (tho' perhaps before he prays he has an inclination to one way,) while he is musing and in great perplexity, that passage comes suddenly into his mind, attended with the circumstances mentioned in the other case, *This is the way, walk ye in it*: that is, the way he has most impressed upon his mind. He takes this for a notable answer to his prayer: and meeting with what his heart went after, he becomes confirmed in the persuasion, and has it strengthened by Gen. xxviii. 15, following it, and many others of the like import. Hence he concludes that he has much interest with God; that he is beloved of the Lord, and that his ways are directed by him. Tho' there is no proof in all this that God has any hand whatever in the whole affair. But what is very remarkable, when a text of scripture comes to the mind which tends to distress, as for instance, when a doubting soul has darted into his mind the words of David, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," it is said to be the temptation of the Devil. But what reason can be assigned for this? Has Satan power only over *uncomfortable* passages of scripture; or cannot he pervert *any part* of them, to tempt

tempt and deceive men with? and if so, then its being a comfortable, or a precious promise, is no proof that Satan has not a hand in it. Yea, it appears to be his work *alone* when it tends to confirm the false joy, and false confidence of sinners.

The experience of others arises from, and is maintained by some imaginary symptoms of a work of grace in their souls; such are going about in quest of some token for good in themselves, and when they hear the word, are searching in every corner of their heart, to see if something favorable does not appear there, and that generally with a strong bias in the mind, to make the most of what they find; that much the same use has been made of these signs, as the ancient Pharisees made of the law. Hence some signs and marks are given for professors to judge of their state by, that are common to believers and hypocrites; and others, that have no foundation at all in the word of God; from which, when they are perceived, or imagined to be in them, they conclude well of themselves. But when the more thinking part of them come to reflect, they perceive, that many have had those things and yet fallen away, which tends to create sad suspense; and though nothing but the blood of Christ, flowing freely to the chief of sinners, can effectually remove the torment of the mind, yet their leaders, either from ignorance of, or disaffection to this sovereign remedy, set themselves to distinguish where there is no difference, and to create reverence for their own judgment, divide and subdivide very nicely, betwixt what are genuine convictions, desires, affections; and so on; and what are counterfeit, whereby the mind is frequently more entangled, and heavier burdens laid upon it. And after all the labor and pains, it is generally found a difficult piece of work, to persuade some to think well of themselves; the most that they can be brought to is, that, *they desire to believe*; and when nothing else will

will do, they get some sort of ease by hearing, that *the desire of faith is faith*. This reminds me of what I once heard an old woman say to one of these "doubting believers," with whom she had taken much pains to make her think well of herself; but her patience at length being worn out, she exclaimed, "You are the most uncomfortable people in the world to talk to. There's no end in it, for no sooner has one removed one doubt, but you bring up twenty more."—The opportunities wherein comfort and joy are obtained from this source, are called "Bethel-visits;" and if the persons are what is called orthodox in their creed, although they should not think much about a godly conversation, or of observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, but on the contrary, through frequent returns of these fits of affection, should grow tired of religion; yet believing the final perseverance of the saints, they know that if once in grace then always in grace, and can address their souls in words often used upon this occasion,

"Did Jesus once upon thee shine?

"Then Jesus is forever thine."

In like manner they are asked, "Do you recollect in any part of your life, either in reading, hearing, praying, or conversing, when you enjoyed the presence of God?" (of which they are to form their own conceptions) "if so, then my soul for your's all is safe," or in words to this effect. Hence they conclude, that as by divine assistance they have exerted an act of faith (that is, persuaded themselves that they are not as other men) and have enjoyed the divine presence—all is secure and well. It only happens to be "winter with the soul," and if the person dies in this wintry season, it is hoped all is well, because we have been told God puts many of his children *to bed in the dark!*—If any doctrine deserves to be denominated *Antinomian*, surely this

does, for what can be more dangerous, or what have a greater tendency to lull professors to sleep, in the bed of carnal security, and encourage them to sin, with the hope of impunity? Once more: there are others whose experiences arise from what is called by them the “assurance of faith,” or in other words, the appropriating the benefits of the Gospel, Christ, Heaven, and so on, to *myself*; and if we closely attend to the experience arising from this doctrine, we shall find that it does not come so much from the things believed, as from the consciousness that they are *OURS*. We shall hear persons of this sentiment cry down *works* and *legal doctrines*, and set up what they call *faith* in opposition to them, and they will speak many excellent things about grace and the gospel; but then we are somehow led to imagine, that these things declared in common to the world, are little or nothing without the appropriating act. This act is sometimes made upon internal qualifications; but others cut the matter much shorter, and appropriate without any evidence, either from scripture, sense, or reason, or in other words they vainly imagine, though firmly persuade themselves, that it is so, because they believe it to be so. They confess that it is not a truth before it is believed, but becomes a certain truth when they believe it, and never would have been true had not they assured themselves that it was so. This persuasion begets joy and great peace, yea even leads them, to use one of their own expressions, to “bask before the throne.” Such will talk of lying very humble before the Lord, and will make high pretences to humility; but not knowing wherein true humility consists, they very awkwardly ape it. In giving an account of their rich experiences, wonderful discoveries, and so on; they tell us “at such a season I was humbled in the very dust—was entirely emptied of self—saw my heart as black as hell, and as deceitful as the devil, and was

as low as I well could be in self abasement." And this will be attended with great outward show of humiliation; perhaps in the meanness or peculiarity of their dress—the affected manner of their speech—some strange gestures—solemn looks, &c. so that if one would take their word for it, they are the most humble creatures under heaven. Yet if their general conduct is but closely looked into, we shall see them to be the most haughty, assuming, and audaciously proud, of any among the sons of men. The writer has had occasion to see the best affected humility spoiled, by an honest friend to truth charging the pretender thereto, with the very thing, he had confessed himself the subject of. The person, whom we will call *Humilis*, having in one of his prayers, confessed before the Lord the hypocrisy of his heart, that he was less than the least of all saints, and not worthy to be named among the children of God: his friend having observed some things about him, which laid but too just a foundation for such a confession; took the liberty of expostulating with him. But *Humilis* having forgot what manner of person he had confessed himself to be; was very much chagrined at the charge; his temper warmed; which at length arose to the heights of resentment—in short, if the whole were told, it would appear that *Humilis* had a very deceitful sense of the deceitfulness of his heart.—From hence it is plain, as well as from various other circumstances, that the chief end in this voluntary humility, is to be thought very humble christians, and persons of great diffidence; by all who hear them, that in their estimation they may be set foremost on the list of saints. The account God makes of this parade may be seen Isaiah lxxv. 5. The whole of it is founded in ignorance; for did such know what *cause* there is in them, for self-abasement before God; that would appear so great, that astonishment would seize them, that such wretches as they are, so filthy and abomi-

nable, are not more deeply abased before him whose name is HOLY. If we did but entertain just sentiments of ourselves, we should wonder why the Lord should condescend, to call our lowest abasement *humility*, when even then, we are infinitely short of being so low as we ought to be. A person truly humbled before God, would think it a much greater instance of pride in him to boast of his humility, than for a slave who has washed his master's feet, to triumph in the great stoop he had made. But the fact is, those who delight to talk of their humility, have an intolerably high conceit of their own importance; which makes them think, that the least condescension below what they imagine themselves to be, is great humility!—We also hear much of their hearts being filled with the love of God, and how great their love to God is. But their love flows from a vain, blind conceit, that God loves them in particular; it is not the true character of God, either in the law or in the gospel, that draws their attention. Besides, did they know the infinite loveliness of God, and the boundless lengths, breadths, and depths of his love to sinners, they would be led in their highest flame of love to God to confess, that in comparison with what it ought to be, it is very flat and languid. But if *their own interest* in the great things of God be called in question; if they are charged with sin, because of the sad and shameful defects in their love, and are told that nothing can relieve them, under a sense of their deficiencies, notwithstanding all their former experiencies, but that which saved the *Thief* upon the cross; if they are warned to fear, lest a promise being made of entering into rest, any of them should seem to come short of it, and are addressed with those words "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We shall be charged with raising foundations—making the hearts of God's people sad—discouraging them in their pilgrimage, and laying stumbling blocks

blocks in the way; and, in the temper that influenced our Lord's hearers in the Synagogue at Nazareth, we shall hear them saying, "What, have I who have been a professor of Christ so many years, and have been indulged with communion with God. I who have basked before the throne, and have been indulged with so many Bethel-visits from the Lord, am I at last reduced to the same situation, as to the ground of my hope and comfort, as a sinner in his first coming to Christ? How shocking the thought! How alarming the consideration! If I could admit this to be true, I must give up all and despair."— Thus some have shown their enmity to the gospel hope, and plainly declared, that their experience comes from the soothing thought that Christ and heaven are *theirs*; though it is certain that Christ proposes nothing, but his grace manifested in his death and resurrection, for the relief of any of his people, under a consciousness of their deficiencies and daily backslidings. Witness, 2. Cor. xii. 8. Rev. i. 17. From the whole, though one would be ready to think, from hearing the doctrinal creed of these persons, that they have some regard for the disallowed gospel, yet when we trace them to their experiences, and mark the use they make of them, it but too visibly appears where their hope in reality is grounded.

To conclude: from the specimens that have been produced of the best approved experiences, though each party is ready to censure the other, either for legality or presumption, and so would seem widely to differ from them; every one taught of God will easily discern, that in fact they all agree in *one central point*; and that is, to make up some kind of a foundation for the guilty to build their hope upon, aside from the perfect atonement, and everlasting righteousness of the Son of God. And though some will speak of Christ's work in high strains, and would at first view appear to make it all in all,

yet it is plain, that without taking into consideration something either acquired by them, or wrought in them, along with his work, they do not find rest to their souls; and therefore the more clear the profession, the greater the deception, and the more liable to entangle unwearied souls. Because this kind of *self dependance* is varnished over with evangelical phrases, and so lies deep and unsuspected. Whether then our preservative against despair, or the source of our experience be called, everlasting reason—a life of piety, virtue, and devotion—some pleasing feelings of the mind, arising either from bodily sensations, dreams, impressions upon the imagination, or the zeal of a blustering preacher—the evidence of a supposed work of grace begun, or a powerful persuasion of the goodness of our state, it is foreign to the hope set before the guilty in the gospel, and far distant from the source of all true christian-experience. In them, therefore, who are thus carried away, are the words of the Prophet verified, *Is. ix. 16. The leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed.* It would be the greatest happiness that could befall such, to be fairly convinced of the delusion, and be persuaded of the sufficiency of the truth in Christ to give them peace and joy in believing. But alas! their bands are generally strong, and the least that is to be expected, for making the friendly attempt, (unless the arm of the Lord be revealed) is a sneer, an outcry of uncharitableness, a complaint of a bad spirit, or a charge of being an enemy to christian experience.

SECTION. II.

Wherein the nature of *true* CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE is considered.

IT is very common for persons carried away with the workings of corrupted nature, and the delusions of Satan, to charge those who, out of love to their

their souls, expostulate with them, and expose their error to them, with denying all christian experience. But is it not very unfair to conclude, that because we don't hold a point to be true, in *every sense* in which persons have set it forth, therefore we do not believe it in *any sense*?—Every Christian has experience of the following nature, viz. That which ariseth from the flesh, the corruption of nature, and the various trials with which his heavenly Father sees meet to prove him; and from the inward proof, or trial that his soul has, of the gospel of peace and salvation, or from finding that to be true, by actual enjoyment, which he believes upon the unerring testimony of God. Of these we shall speak more particularly.

First: Man is naturally of the earth, earthy. His constitution was framed to dwell on the earth, and to hold communion with God in the things that are made, through the medium of his obedience; so that it was no crime for Adam to set his affections on things which are upon the earth, or to be of a legal spirit. We may justly say, therefore, that it is *natural* for man to cleave to the earth, and also to have a strong propensity, to seek the favor of God by his own works. This state is commonly termed nature, or the natural man, and at other times the flesh. Rom. iv. 1. Gal. iii. 3. 1. Cor. ii. 14. But James iii. 15. not only represents man as *earthly*, but also *sensual*, and *devilish*; and Paul, referring to the same thing, says, *The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*, Rom. viii. 7. 8. Such is the dreadful malignity of the flesh as corrupted by sin, and such the contrariety of it to the divine nature, that it is impossible it ever should be made like to God, or even in the least degree conformed to him, being in its very essence absolute ENMITY against him.—This corrupt principle is properly inherent, being interwoven with the very texture of our constitution.

stitution. Or rather we are said to be *in the flesh*, that is, covered in and overwhelmed with its impurity; so that naturally our thoughts, words, and actions are under the dominion and powerful influence thereof.—When a soul is born of God, we are not to imagine that the *old man* is better natured than he was before; or that there is a change, *in our corrupt nature*, for the better. For we have the authority of the Holy Ghost to say, and the experience of Paul to evince, that *in the flesh* dwells no good thing, it is neither converted nor totally destroyed. There is indeed a *new* principle, a vital, spiritual, and divine source of life implanted, which liveth and abideth forever, even the word which by the gospel is preached, and which is called *spirit*. But this is not nature renewed, but a principle as opposite to nature, as light is to darkness. Hence we read that the *flesh* lusteth against the *spirit*, and the *spirit* against the *flesh*, and these are CONTRARY the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would, Gal. v. 17. Corrupt nature, or sin that dwelleth in us, is so full of enmity to God, so deceitful, so desperately wicked, that it is *past all cure*. We might as well attempt to wash the Ethiopian white, or to change the Leopard's spots, as to make the carnal mind any better disposed towards God and his law, even the great Physician himself has marked it incurable, and died that it might be *destroyed*, Rom. vi. 6. It must, therefore, in whatever measure it remains in the soul, retain its corrupt principles and properties.—Now the opposite principles of *flesh* and *spirit*, or *nature* and *grace*, dwelling in the same soul, they cannot fail to oppose each other. Each strives for the victory, and aims at the total extirpation of the other, so that war is continually maintained, James iv. 1. 1. Peter ii. 11. Every believer then, has painful experience of this law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, which has made the Saints in all ages groan, being
burthened

burthened. Hence we find some of them making use of such expressive language as the following,—*Behold I am vile—I abhor myself—I am undone—I am as a beast before thee—I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man—In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.* Those who have been made partakers of *grace*, cannot be reconciled to the *flesh*; they long and pray for its destruction, in all its properties. The different and opposite actings of *flesh* and *spirit* may briefly be described as follows: We have seen, that man was created to live by virtue of his *own* righteousness; hence self-righteousness, is a chief property of nature, and all who are born again, find in themselves a strong bias to reject the righteousness of Christ, and establish their own; and that in various forms, and under various pretences, and none but believers in Christ are aware of the evil of this propensity—this is the root of unbelief—this cleaves close to, and easily besets every child of Adam, but as the believer only is conscious of it, the more he increases in the knowledge of Jesus, the more perceptible will these self-righteous propensities be to him. So that, tho' once he was very unwilling to think himself indisposed to the gospel, he now finds a constant necessity of suspecting himself of this evil. But the true grace of God in the heart leads the sinner to live by the righteousness of Christ, its genuine language is, *And be found in him not having on my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, and, I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.* Here then is the chief point where watchfulness in the believer is requisite, lest the ever restless principle of self-righteousness should prevail.—The *flesh* tends to the earth, being earthy—the *spirit* is for having the affection set on things above, and for looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. The *flesh* is for gratifying

tifying the corrupt inclinations, which are sensual and devilish ;—the *spirit* is for mortifying the deeds of the body, and denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts. *Nature* shudders at the thought of death, and indeed were it to act otherwise, it would deny itself—the desire of *grace* is, *To depart and be with Christ which is far better*. Thus we see that every believer has a carnal, fleshly principle dwelling in him, but not reigning ; abiding, but not ruling ; in some measure cast down, but not entirely destroyed. He has also a spiritual and divine principle, an immortal seed that is springing up unto everlasting life. When nature is dissolved, the corrupt principle will be destroyed, and in the resurrection, the Saints shall have their bodies fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and their renewed spirits shall inhabit this incorruptible frame ; and by virtue of that righteousness, which is upon all who believe, enjoy eternal life.

Again : the believer has much experience, arising from the various trials which his heavenly father sees meet to bring upon him ; or which he, through his own weakness or imprudence, may bring upon himself. The trials of his faith may be of various kinds : sometimes prosperity, and at other times adversity ; which have their different effects upon his mind ; all of which tend to convince him, of standing in constant need of being upheld by the Lord, and in the end prove rich benefits to his soul, Heb. xii. 10. James i. 2. 4. 1. Peter i. 7. He finds under these various trials, that *Tribulation worketh patience : and patience experience : and experience hope*. For while under the painful feelings of the body of sin and death, the temptations of satan, who is continually attacking him, and the trials of life ; he experiences divine grace sufficient for him—so that while in the world he has tribulation, in Jesus he has peace. He has hereby that hope, which is built
alone.

alone on the riches of divine grace, confirmed: and hereby knows in whom he has believed, and becomes persuaded (not only from the certainty that ariseth from the divine declaration, but from his own joyful experience) that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him until that day; having found already that the love and power of Christ were sufficient to support him when, Without were fightings—within were fears.

Secondly: we have now to speak more largely of the inward proof and trial that believers have of gospel truths. Such is the nature of every gospel truth, that no sooner is it received in the light of the Holy Spirit, than it produces in the mind every answerable affection; and as the happy soul advances in the knowledge of the truth, he finds himself, as it were, in an infinite circle. The transcendent beauty, glory, and suitableness of divine truth engages his attention;—with steady purpose of heart he pursues it, and receives the blessings contained in it; whereby his soul is fed, nourished, and strengthened, though far from being *cloyed*; but finding his life in the enjoyment thereof, presses after more enlarged views and experience of the blessed realities, even until he arrives at all riches of the full assurance of understanding, which, in the very nature of the thing, must lead him an eternal round of knowing, and desiring to know—of enjoying and longing to enjoy: still rising higher and higher—still learning more of the excellent knowledge of Christ; of his unparalleled, exquisite and satisfying sweetness; which only makes the soul hunger and thirst for more! for the truth of Christ can never, never cloy.

Here it might be observed, that what distinguishes true gospel-experience from its various counterfeits, is, that what the soul feels the force of is, *The truth as it is in Jesus*, and not any manner in which the mind is exercised, in looking to, or receiving the truth

truth, but the truth *itself*, even all the excellent things contained in the gospel, (viz.)—the glorious character of God—his great love in giving his dear, his only, his well beloved Son to die the just for the unjust—the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross—and the glory, sufficiency, and freeness of the gospel to heal, pardon, and save the guilty. So that when a christian speaks of his experience, he will not furnish us with a long detail of what he has been assisted to do, what success and disappointments he has met with (in attempting to establish his own righteousness) what doubts and fears he has had about the goodness of his state, and his “secret hope at bottom” from his former experience, and so on; but having his heart directed into the love of God, out of the fulness thereof he will speak of the sovereign favor of God—the beauties of the Redeemer’s person, and the glory, excellency, and perfection of his finished work. With these pleasing realities his soul is so taken up, that he has no time to bestow any compliments upon himself, or his own attainments: a sense of the former, charms, chains, and captivates his soul; an acquaintance with the latter lays him in the dust—shows him what a poor, wretched, helpless sinner he is still—how deceitful his heart is—how prone to let slip the gospel-hope, and that he has need of many humbling, and affecting lessons, to subdue his pride. Hence he learns the necessity of distrusting himself, of keeping a watchful eye over his own heart, and of holding fast the beginning of his confidence stedfast unto the end.

Having given some general hints about the nature of gospel-experience, we shall now attend a little more particularly to the subject. But it will not be amiss to collect from the foregoing essays a summary of the gospel, which we have seen is the genuine source of all true experience. The Angel in proclaiming

claiming the Saviour's advent, addressed the shepherds thus, *Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to ALL people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a SAVIOUR who is Christ the Lord.* Which manifestation brings, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.* The primary glory of the gospel consists in the divine perfections of wisdom, holiness, justice, love, mercy, truth and faithfulness being therein glorified in the highest. But in this bright mirror of DEITY there is also represented, the most shocking scene of human misery, that can possibly be set forth, while yet, the good pleasure of God is manifested to men, in the all-sufficient relief that is provided there for sinners of all nations. These things published, contain good tidings of great joy to ALL PEOPLE whether they entertain them as such or no; for our reception or rejection of a truth cannot possibly alter its nature. The glad tidings of the gospel point immediately to every one who hears them. Unto *you* is the word of this salvation sent, and through this man is preached unto *you* the forgiveness of sins, is its benign language to every one who hears it. Whoever then is taught of God, to understand the gospel, will not conceive of it merely as an account of what God intends to do for some unknown persons; but he sees a wide door opened, to sinners of every nation and degree without distinction. No person therefore who doubts of the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ, to give *him* immediate relief under the deepest sense of guilt, believes that very forgiveness that is with God. No person questioning its unlimited freeness, or whether it is addressed to sinners *as such*, believes the same gospel that Jesus and his Apostles preached. No one believing that the blessings of the gospel belong to him, because he is properly principled or qualified, in preference to those who are ungodly and without strength, understands and knows that gos-

pel that is good tidings of great joy to *all people*. It is not denied that either of these persons, heartily, sincerely, affectionately, and steadily believe the gospel in *some sense*, as did Simon Magus, the stony ground hearers and others. But to receive the gospel in any other sense than that which the holy Spirit teacheth, is the most fundamental and pernicious error that any can fall into. However, all who have heard and learned of the father, and so have received the truth in the love of it, will find that it has in some degree or other, the following effects, which may be called the experience of it.

First: Christian-experience consists in the enjoyment of *peace* in the conscience. The work of righteousness that the divine Surety wrought, has made perfect peace with God. Eph. ii. 14. 16. 2. Cor. v. 19. God is now *the very God of peace*—Christ is *the Prince of peace*—the word that proclaims the Saviour's work is *the gospel of peace*, and the Spirit who enlightens the understanding by that word, to know the truth, is *the Spirit of peace*. Surely then the necessary effect of the gospel known and believed, must be *peace* in the conscience. For as the knowledge of God and his law gives the guilty conscience torment; so the knowledge of the ATONEMENT, or full, free, and everlasting forgiveness by the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now this peace of conscience which always, in some degree, follows the belief of the truth, arises *merely* from the blood of Christ, as it freely flows in the gospel proclamation, to sinners of all nations, ranks, and degrees. Hence it appears that true peace does not arise in the guilty conscience, from any thing that the sinner by reflection finds in himself, or from consideration of what he at any time has done, or under any influence whatever has been enabled to do; nor even from any evidences of a true work of grace in his soul; but simply and alone,
from

from the exceeding abundant grace revealed in the gospel, which becomes his hope. Nothing therefore can be more evident, than that he is under some fatal mistake, about the very nature of the gospel, whose faith does not bring peace to his soul. Either he has some suspicion that the blood of Christ *alone* is not sufficient to cleanse *him* from all sin—that it is not so free as to be for every sinner as a sinner that believes it, or that some work of the spirit must be perceived in his soul before he must take the comfort which the gospel brings: which mistake, however small it may seem, if not corrected, will prove destructive. It is true, many are crying peace to themselves, when there is no peace; but then every kind of false peace flows from some mistaken notion of the gospel; from something different from that, which removes the ground of all fear and torment in the soul. Peace coming in this way may be said to proceed from believing: but from believing what? Not that God is well pleased in his Son, but that we are properly principled for receiving Christ, or something of that nature, under some other name. True peace leads the sinner to an absolute and immediate dependance upon the Lord; and so restores him to that from which he fell: while every false peace (as in some form or other it leads to trust in something within) cherishes and promotes that awful apostacy, which began in self-dependance.

Secondly: the believer experiences the meritorious righteousness and perfect atonement of Christ, to be a sufficient encouragement, to give him boldness and access with confidence at the throne of grace. Many have quarrelled with the *Pharisee* mentioned in the parable, Luke xviii. on account of the haughty manner of his approach to God, who yet, in reality, come in the very same way themselves. But those who have been taught of God, find no other ground of encouragement and confidence

dence than what the *Publican* had. 'Under the most aggravated sense of guilt, and conviction of many sad and shameful deficiencies, they derive all their encouragement, from having such an atoning sacrifice to look to—such a faithful God to trust in—such an altar to offer up their prayers and praises upon—such rich incense to perfume them with, as the Mediator's intercession, and such an high priest over the house of God. They mourn indeed over sin with bitter lamentation, abhor themselves as the subjects of it, and watch against it as their worst enemy; but do not take their lamentation's, abasements, &c. into consideration in their approaches to God, but looking to the propitiation, say, *Have mercy upon me O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression*: many who profess to draw nigh to God in this way, have nevertheless the full testimony of their conscience, that in all their approaches there is still a sad distance between God and them. Yet if at any time they can approach the throne, in the persuasion that they are less sinners than once they were—under a consciousness of more affection in their worship than usual, and less deficiencies—or in the belief that they are the children of God, they would have more encouragement, hope of access, and pleasure in their devotion. But this way of approach is founded in legality, manifests that the heart is not right with God, and is directly opposite to the new and living way of coming to him. Heb. x. 19. 22.

Thirdly: in these things, and in this way, the believer has the joyful experience of *communion with God*. Communion signifies fellowship, common possession, or a partaking of the same thing; and communion with God consists in being pleased with, and taking delight in that which is the centre of his delights, with which his smiles, or the manifestation of the light of his countenance is always connected.

needed. Nothing deserves the name of communion with God, but that pleasure which arises in the soul from understanding and knowing the Lord, who executeth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight saith the Lord, Jer. ix. 24. If we would know when this grand exhibition was made on the earth, the voice from the excellent glory informs us, when pointing to the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, “*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*” Whoever therefore, is well pleased with, and delights in the person and work of Immanuel, has communion with God in his blessedness, even fellowship with the father and his son Jesus Christ. But this is very different from what is commonly, though profanely, called communion with God, which arises merely from *self love* and *self-conceit*. Some are confident they hold communion with God; bask before the sun of righteousness; dwell upon the Mount; and have frequent Bethel-visits, because they have some impulses in their duties, or secret whispers, which they call the witness of the spirit, that God loves them far above the greater part of the world; which leads them to talk highly of eternal things, such as, personal election, covenant transactions, and unchanging love, particular redemption, the final perseverance of the saints, and the enjoyment of eternal glory.* And while this is the case, as a certain author observes, “Even pride itself will prejudice them in favor of that which they call Christ. Selfish proud man naturally calls that lovely, that greatly contributes to *his* interest, and gratifies *his* ambition.”—To be upon the Mount, is to understand and delight in what was declared there. To have a Bethel-visit, is to behold heaven

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* It is not these *doctrines* that are intended to be censured, for they are great and glorious in their own nature; but the *abuse* of them.

and earth united, and an intercourse opened between God and man, in the person and work of the mighty God of Jacob manifested in the flesh. To behold all salvation and all desire in Christ—to rejoice in him having no confidence in the flesh, and to glory in this, that we understand and know the Lord as *a just God and a Saviour*, this is communion with God, and nothing else deserves the name.

Fourthly : the gospel presents Jehovah's character in the most *lovely* point of view : so that no one can behold him as there revealed without *loving* him with a supreme affection. Indeed the beauty of God's moral image is set forth in the holy law ; and in that representation he is infinitely worthy to be loved, by all intelligent beings ; and not to love him, in this view, is infinitely criminal. But while man's natural corrupt principles reign ; so far is he from loving this infinitely amiable character, that his heart rises in enmity against it ; which indeed is an awful proof of that gross darkness which, through unbelief of his mercy, covers the soul. Now tho' every rational creature is under obligations to love God for his own excellency (which every believer will do) and though not to love him with all the heart justly deserves everlasting punishment ; yet nothing is more certain, from scripture and fact, than that no person will love God in truth till his natural enmity is broken : which is never done till the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, by the word of truth, quicken his soul. The natural man may love that notion of God which suits his carnal, deceitful, proud, sensual heart ; but every notion of him that does not give us just views of his glorious majesty, holiness, &c. tends to lead us into idolatry. Some are disposed to love God, because they conceive of him as a being so good and benevolent, that he cannot find in his heart to damn them for their sins.—Others feel an affection for the DEITY because they believe he has pardoned all their
sins

sins—exalted them above many of their fellow creatures, and that all the joys of heaven are their own. And these we shall hear speaking in high strains, about sovereign, free, electing love; who yet, when the true nature of God's sovereign love is set forth, and his true character declared, will, like the antient pharisees (who also believed a kind of *absolute Predestination*, †) *bate it*. Yet so essential is *love to God* to the christian character, that he who loveth not is not of God; for God is love. And upon the person who loves not our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the most awful curses are denounced.—To love God includes (1st) Love to that amazing grace, shewn towards sinners in opening a way for their deliverance from deserved wrath. *In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*, 1. John iv. 9. 10. John iii. 16. (2dly) In connection with the above, love to him for his special benefits and favors conferred upon us; for it would be an instance of the greatest ingratitude not to love him for the bestowment of favors so divine. (3dly) Love to that grand and most beautiful display of the divine perfections, drawn out in the obedience and atonement of Christ. Here the divine holiness shines forth with the brightest lustre, in its infinite opposition to sin, by appointing the HOLY ONE to magnify the law and make it honorable—the inflexible justice of God appears, in its persisting in the punishment of sin according to its infinite demerits, even though his well beloved Son must bear the weighty stroke; and every other divine attribute shines most gloriously. Whoever acknowledges this, and loves this appearance of the true God, justifies the Divine proceedings toward the angels that

† See Prideaux's Connection, vol. II. part II. p. 341.

that fell; and also his dealings with sinners, who break the law; and owns, that if all the world had been consigned over to eternal death, the character of God would have appeared infinitely glorious. We shall hear many talking of beholding great beauty in Jehovah's goodness, mercy and love, who manifest no disposition to love him, for the tremendous display of his holiness and justice, in opposition to sin. Yet nothing but a full conviction of divine glory in the distribution of justice, will effectually stop the cavils of man's pride, against the procedure of divine sovereignty.

But here let it be observed, that no one can love God, and at the same time love sin. 1. John i. 6. No one can love God, and at the same time hate his law, or speak unworthy things of it. Rom. vii. 12. No person loves God who goes about to pervert the gospel of his grace, Gal. i. 8. Nor can any one love God, who does not love his brother, and study the good of mankind. 1. John iv. 20. chap. iii. 17—Every one who loves the character of God is led to imitate it.

Fifthly: the gospel of grace gives the highest display of the great God: of his tremendous perfections, and their infinite opposition to sin; so that where ever it is truly known and received, it cannot fail to implant the *fear of God*. The black character of the wicked is, that *There is no fear of God before their eyes*. Rom. iii. 18. Hence the Lord promises, in the new and everlasting covenant, to put *his fear* into his people's hearts. And this, we are informed, is the beginning of wisdom.—Every doctrine, but the doctrine of Christ, tends more or less to keep out godly fear from the soul. Hence the gospel; though it is the very source of the joys of the holy Ghost, strikes at the root of all false confidence, false joys and disobedience. A sort of fear or dread of God is sometimes awakened by the dictates of the natural conscience, and enforced by the

the written law ; but from the knowledge of the truth, the fullest impressions of the living God are made on the mind, and of course, a more genuine and lasting experience of his fear is implanted there ; the happy and salutary effects of which, among many others, are the following : (1st) It begets conviction of sin in the soul, where the conscience has been seared, and enforces and confirms it, where slight impressions have been made. Nothing better suited to awaken the attention to a just sense of sin, than the preaching of the cross of Christ, which makes known God's terrible wrath against it. Deep convictions of sin may be in the soul, previous to any saving illumination, and may occasion great terrors there, which may be stifled and expelled by a false hope : but when the perfection of the holy law appears to the sinner in the glass of Christ's sufferings, then he perceives that God is just indeed ! and that there is nothing about himself, but what exposes him to the most awful frown of Jehovah ; and from this source he learns more of the infinite heinousness of sin, and has the fullest display of its dreadful consequences. The fear of God, in the sense spoken of here, as proceeding from the knowledge of God in Christ, is perfectly consistent with the strongest confidence of Christ's ability to save to the uttermost—it possesses the mind of a believer in the full assurance of faith—in the delightful enjoyments of love, and in the firmest persuasion of his own interest, in electing, redeeming, calling, and preserving grace. Yea this reverence and godly fear maintains in the soul, an increasing view of the evil nature of sin, while it grows in knowledge of, love to, and hope in the gospel of peace : and is therefore distinct in its very nature, from that slavish fear, which arises from *pride*, working in a way of painful desire, attended with many fears, till it is crowned with the enjoyment of self-complacency in its own works—quite the reverse of that fear, which fills

fills the mind with torment, till it can say, with some assurance, *God I thank thee that I am not as other men.* It cannot be thought the true believer is led by his faith in Christ, and confidence of interest in him, to fear sin less, than when he expected to be sent to hell for the commission of it; or is emboldened to transgress the least command in hope of impunity; much less will he embrace that vile tenet, that soul destructive error, that believers are not under the law as a rule of conduct, and so cannot sin! Nor does the believer in Christ imagine that *his* sins are less displeasing to God, or less deserving of the curse, than those of the most profane; that sentiment is purely *Antinomian*, which teaches professors to think that *their* sins only deserve *fatherly chastisements*. What! does our profession of faith in Christ make sin otherwise than an infinite evil in us? Or does God, like some indulgent parent, wink at our transgressions? Far be it from us to think so of him, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; rather let us say that the least transgression in a professor, is attended with abundant more ingratitude and baseness than in others, and will lead a real believer to the blood of Jesus for pardon as a poor sinner, who has no hope but in the promise of mercy to the guilty. But this sentiment wears a very hostile aspect towards those who get relief, when under a sense of guilt, by referring to their past experiences: and indeed it must be offensive to our corrupt nature; because it necessarily leads the soul to live near to, and constantly dependant upon, an infinitely holy and sovereign God. (2dly) The true fear of God in the heart promotes a genuine spirit of devotion, and a suitable frame of soul for the whole worship of God. Many out of a false notion of boldness, and eminent nearness to, and familiarity with God, are guilty of much impertinence and irreverence before him. Did but the fear of God prevail in our souls, we should not dare to approach

approach him but with sentiments of deep abasement. Believers, it is true, do not come before the Lord as *slaves*, but with a nearness of *union* and *relation*; the subjects of the true grace of God are taught, by that grace, to worship and serve him with reverence and godly fear—for our God is a consuming fire. In this way the angels worship. Isaiah vi. (3dly.) By this fear the Lord preserves his people from falling away. Jer. xxxii. 10. By this the believer knows that God is well pleased only in his son, and with *him* only as united to Christ. He perceives hereby, that if he turn aside from the hope exhibited in the death of Christ, there remains nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume him. Under every fresh conviction of sin, it leads the soul to the atonement, as its only relief. In brief, it draws off the soul from every false source of peace, and keeps it fixed, trusting only in the free grace of God in Christ.

Sixthly: the faith of the gospel produces a *gospel spirit*; or promotes the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.—The nature of a *gospel spirit* has been much mistaken. It is generally thought to consist in some kind of an affected *self-diffidence*, *tame submission*, and *universal catholicism*; or, in accommodating our views of the gospel to other men's notions; and thinking all good christians, how ever widely their ideas of the nature and design of Christ's work, may be. But the gospel of grace creates an utter aversion to this spirit, and also to that canting, whining, fawning way, that always accompanies it, and teaches its adherents tenaciously to hold the truth, boldly to maintain the faith, undauntedly to reject and expose every attempt to pervert the gospel, and to limit their charity to those who are *of the truth*, and make it manifest by hearing the great Shepherd's voice and following him.—The gospel, most certainly, promotes a spirit agreeable to its own nature, where

where ever it comes in power, for the believer *beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, is changed into the same image.* A *gospel spirit* is a spirit of humility, meekness, forgiveness, love, and compassion. As to humility, we have already taken a view of that which the Apostle calls voluntary, or affected; and in regard to genuine humility, it may be justly said that no person is a partaker of it, who has not renounced those refuges of lies, which the natural man flies to, and fortifies himself in, and as a *naked sinner* believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. *Then*, and not till then, is the haughtiness of man bowed down, and the loftiness of man made low, when *the Lord alone is exalted.* By believing in, coming to, and depending upon the atonement and righteousness of Christ *alone*, for peace, salvation, and eternal life; the sinner forsakes his own righteousness, holiness, tears, sanctification, humblings, &c. This proud nature cannot bear. To do it therefore is the most humbling thing in the world, for the secret thought that there is something good, at least in the inclination, is the last thing a sinner gives up; and while any such thought prevails, and the soul is influenced accordingly, the spirit of pride rules in the heart. But when Christ is received, humility ascends the throne, and governs in the soul; the sinner then learns that there is an infinite disproportion between what he knows, and does not know of Christ—the strength of his faith in, and love to him—the degree of his likeness to his image, and his abasement before him; and what (from the consideration of the *cause* there is for these things) there ought to be, so that he considers himself as the least of saints, and abhors himself in dust and ashes. We shall not hear the sinner thus taught of God, talking high things of his own love, attainments, and humility; for in the fairest view he can take of himself, he sees abundant reason to be ashamed and confounded, and an absolute need of looking to that blood which cleanseth

cleanseth from all sin :—and his demeanor will be answerable hereunto.

Again : the truth believed produces a spirit of meekness, which consists in a readiness to entertain all that God has spoken, Jam. i. 21. and a temper of mind that suffers injuries without seeking revenge ; that quietly submits to the will of God, and is gentle towards all men. Col. iii. 12. Tit. ii. 3. Math. xi. 29. This spirit Jesus was our eminent exemplar of, and all his genuine disciples, in their measure, copy after him. Yet let it be observed, that this spirit is by no means opposed to being valiant for the truth, for even the meek and lowly Jesus, our bright example, ever opposed *error* with a steady zeal, regardless of the highest names among men : witness his controversies with the Pharisees. This spirit of meekness will teach us in all controversies about the faith, to distinguish between *persons* and *errors*—to avoid all bitterness and wrath, and evil speakings in regard to the *former*, and to show the warmest indignation, and most steady opposition to the *latter*. In short, it is in perfect friendship with that *zeal*, which promotes universal boldness for Christ, and carries the friends of truth above the displeasure and wrath of man.

Further ; a gospel spirit is a *forgiving* spirit. This is so essential to the christian-character, that there is not the least shadow of real godliness without it, Math. xviii. 22. to the end, also Mark xi. 25. the great motive to this is, Col. iii. 13. But it is much to be lamented, that while many marks and evidences of believing have been given ; this doctrine has been but little spoken of, and less practised, even amongst the professed friends of *practical godliness*. How often do we see a spirit of revenge in one professing christian towards another, who not only let the sun go down on their wrath, but even for days, weeks, months, and years, retain their anger ; and this even among persons of the same religious communi-

ty. But how can such persons from their heart pray, *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*? How can they have fellowship one with another in the Lord's Supper, where the doctrine of forgiveness is illustrated, confirmed, enforced, and professed? Or what proof have such that *their* trespasses are forgiven them? For upon the principles laid down, Math. xviii. it is plain, that notwithstanding a person may profess himself a saint, and be held in high reputation for his acquaintance with doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion; yet if he be not under the prevailing influence of this *gospel spirit*, he is none of Christ's, Rom. viii. 9. From such considerations as these many may strive, from wrong motives, and to wrong ends, to acquire this spirit; but it never enters the soul till the gospel is understood and believed, and so is a part of gospel-experience.

Once more: the knowledge of the truth promotes a genuine spirit of love to the brethren. For as the gospel implants the love of God in the soul, so also he that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten, 1. John iv. 20. The ground of this love is expressed, 2. John ver. 2. The motive to it the *new commandment*, 1. John iii. 23. and the manifestation of it in *deed* and in *truth*, in opposition to professing it in *word* and in *tongue*, is the great evidence of having passed from death unto life, ver. 14. yet this spirit pays the highest regards to *all* the precepts of the kingdom of heaven, and leads those who possess it to be faithful to their brethren, and even sharply to reprove them, when they walk unworthy of the heavenly calling. Love will not suffer sin upon the brethren. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind: charity envieth not: charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth*

all

all things. To conclude : a *gospel spirit* is a spirit of benevolence and compassion, Titus iii. 2. and leads to pity and relieve, as far as in our power, the poor, indigent, and afflicted, in imitation of him who went about doing good, and hereby we are followers of God as dear children. From what has before been observed, upon the believer's experience of the body of sin, &c. none will imagine that it is here insinuated, that the opposites of a gospel spirit are totally excluded. For if they were, it would be difficult to understand what is meant, by the followers of Christ denying themselves—losing their life—taking up their cross—and warring against the flesh. Yet, nothing can be a greater absurdity, than the notion of a *proud, spiteful, envious, unmerciful, hypocritical, hard-hearted* christian : though such a character, making pretensions to the christian name, might readily be discovered, even amongst those who bear the highest repute for *seriousness, and depth of experience!*

Lastly : The last kind of christian-experience which I shall mention, is *practical godliness*; or observing all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. This has been generally ranked under the notion of *externals*, and he who ever insists much, upon the importance and necessity of it, is sure to procure the charge of *legality*. Even as a scriptural defence of the *One thing needful*, draws forth the charge of *Antinomianism*. But the nature of a legal spirit is often mistaken, and even those very persons, who are most zealous against it, are most frequently under the influence of it, for legality is a very subtle thing. If steadily and zealously maintaining, that no person is a christian, but he who from the same motives, by the same rule, and to the same end obeys the commands of Christ, as the apostles and primitive christians did, be deemed *legal*, the writer frankly professes himself a *stubborn legalist*. Some in the heights of their zeal for doctrinal religion, and o-

thers amidst their attention to the workings of their affections, have had but little regard, indeed seem almost to have forgotten, practical godliness, which is the immediate effect of true knowledge and experience. Others would seem to pay great regard and reverence to the kingly authority of Christ, who yet have taken upon them to cut and carve upon his commands, as most conveniently serves their worldly interest, and religious reputation. From this quarter we have heard much about what is *essential*, and what *non-essential*: what particulars we are to obey that Christ has commanded, and what might be left undone without incurring the censure of our Judge. But may we not modestly inquire, By what authority they do these things, and who gave them this authority? Indeed while the traditions of men have been mingled with the precepts and ordinances of Jesus Christ, there is great propriety in distinguishing between *essentials* and *non-essentials*; and if we may be permitted to assume for a moment the dictator's chair, the distinction may stand thus, ALL things that Christ has commanded his disciples to do, to the least jot or tittle of them, we will call *ESSENTIAL*: and every alteration of, and addition to them, we will venture to call *NON-ESSENTIAL*, or so many cyphers, which the disciples of Jesus may censure, expose, and reject at pleasure. When it is said obedience to Christ's commands is *essential*; it is not to be understood that through our obedience, in any sense whatever, salvation is obtained; but that a universal compliance with them is essential to the *fear of God*, the *love of God*, and the *obedience of faith*; and to say that because the commands of Christ are not essential to salvation, therefore I will not obey, proceeds not from the Spirit of truth, but from him who first taught man to sin with hope of impunity, and favors both of legality and licentiousness. No one who enjoys the powerful experience of the precious truth,

truth, will dare to make light of any duty the gospel enforces; knowing that the beginning of all misery in the world, was the breach of such a *positive* precept, as the generality of professors, in this day of refinement, would deem *trivial, punctilious, circumstantial, or non-essential*. He therefore esteems his word in *all* things to be right, and will not admit any such distinction between great and small in the commandments of Christ, as shall tend to make void, or cast the least contempt upon the kingly office of the Lord the Redeemer, much less will he prescribe *how far* Christ *ought* to require obedience. And surely, if there is any truth in the scriptures, those ordinances and precepts enjoined upon, and observed by the apostolic churches, are as much binding upon Christ's disciples *now* as they were *then*; and if obedience to the new-testament precepts was *then*, the standing rule of judging of those who made pretensions to the knowledge of Christ, is not the same rule to be observed *now*? It is true there may be much external appearance, where there is no true faith, and where this is the case, the most splendid works, however useful to men, are in his sight, who judges not by outward appearance, but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

The inclination of the will to do whatsoever Christ has commanded, from those motives and to those ends that he requires; is the inward experience or effect, of the belief of the truth; and the external conduct, or actual performance of what the will determines, must of course be the effect, and so the experience, of the truth. And nothing can more properly be called *experimental-religion*, than, when Christ and his ways are set before us on the one hand; and the world with its pleasures, profits, honors, &c. on the other: and the former cannot be attended to without exposing us to the loss of the latter, together with shame, reproaches, &c. if the knowledge we have of Christ proves powerful to

incline us to revere his authority, and makes us willing to suffer the loss of all things for his sake; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; this is a proper *experiment* of the truth and power of what we believe. And all experience without this is worse than nothing. If a man say he loves his brother for the sake of the truth, and yet sees him in need and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him; it is plain he has no experience of the love of God dwelling in him. He professes, it may be, to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tho' he was rich yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, but when he sees his brother in needy circumstances he finds no heart to imitate the divine goodness; from whence it is plain, that he does not stand *in the true grace of God*. He professes to trust in the Lord, but in refusing to lend unto him, by giving unto the poor, the hypocrisy of his profession is laid sufficiently open; it is plain he trusts in uncertain riches and not in the living God, and his heart goes after covetousness.—*They know most of gospel-experience* who are most devoted in their lives to God; who are of a humble, meek, forgiving, loving, compassionate spirit, who deny themselves for the sake of Christ, and to promote the welfare of his church; who walk with God in their families, provide things honest in the sight of all men, observe the things Christ has commanded; and count all things but loss for the excellent knowledge of HIM. But alas! instead of the generality of professors proving their *faith* by their *works*, they offer no better evidence of it than either a confident assertion that they have exerted the appropriating act, or a long detail of their convictions, discoveries, experiences, and so on; all of which amount to nothing more than what the apostle James styles a man's SAYING he has faith; which in fact is no evidence at all, unless it be confirmed by

by a good conversation. But what is the reason why practical Antinomianism, or a neglecting to observe Christ's commands, so much abounds amongst those professors who inveigh against the name? Various reasons have been given, such as Ministers dwelling too much upon doctrinal points, and professors neglecting self-examination, and closet devotion; and conforming too much to the world, &c. I shall not at present take upon me to say any thing about these things, but close this section with the sentiment of an *Association letter*, † not long ago published; the writer of which, after observing that a *legal spirit* has contributed much to the injury of vital godliness, adds, “By a spirit of legality, we mean, such a temper and disposition of mind, as tends, in a measure, to eclipse, and to keep the glory of the everlasting gospel so far from our sight; as, that we fear to believe its freeness and fulness, its riches and glory, as relating to ourselves, on account of our own unworthiness, which frightens and drives us from our closets; which drives us from family duty; which drives us from the table of the Lord; which drives us from our places in the house of God; which drives us into a spirit of wrangling and disputing with our brethren about trifles; which drives us into the world; which drives us into sin, and which would, if it were not for the covenant of grace, at last drive us into hell. Hence the complaints so often made of orthodox worldlings, gospel heads and legal hearts, dry doctrines, empty notions, and the like. But why all this? Are the doctrines of Christ dry, insipid, and unfavoury? Are those precious truths empty and void of life, power, and spirituality? We answer, No. Why then these complaints? The reason is, because it is too visible that we are upon a sad decline, in regard to the life and power of religion among us.”

† *Kentish Association* in the year 1782, written by Mr. Lloyd of Yesterdon.

and indeed how can it be otherwise, till we return to him from whom we have revolted? But how shall we return? Where does the obstacle lie?—A legal spirit lies concealed and unsuspected in our breasts. We wish you to consider, dear brethren, whether when you have had a sense of sin, with all its horrors, and found a desire to return to Christ, your only help; whether this evil spirit we have now been describing, has not stopped you at the closet door; where you have, perhaps, had a debate in your own mind, whether a person in your circumstances might come so boldly and freely to a throne of grace, as you take upon you to do without some pre-requisites, in order to qualify you for the same. Whether the gospel is free to sinners, as such; or whether you have any right to Christ and his grace at all. Now it is easy to see how such a debate as this will end, (*viz.*) greatly to your prejudice; and your future conduct, perhaps, in the family, in the church, and in the world, will be too striking a proof of it.—Take this for a never failing rule that where legality is thus suffered to get the better of us, carnality, sensuality, and worldly-mindedness will be sure to follow upon it.—If you would keep near to God, and often frequent the throne of grace; if you would wish to be useful and honorable christians in your day and generation; then remember you are to go to God as sinners, with all your guilt and filth, without washing yourself first, and then coming to the fountain to be further cleansed. It would be the extremity of folly to complain of the deadness of the times in which we live; the judgments of God upon us as a nation; and to exaggerate the great and crying sins that have brought these judgments upon us, without striking at the root of all these evils, (*viz.*) a slight and contempt of the gospel; which is done, either more or less, when we do not enter into the spirit and design of it.—The man who enters into the spirit and design of the gospel will

will live upon it by the day; will constantly deal with the blood and righteousness of Christ for pardon and acceptance, and will constantly find help, and of course will walk worthy of his high calling, and so be an honor and credit to his profession."



SECTION III.

Wherein some QUESTIONS are stated and considered relative to the Sentiment contained in this ESSAY.

QUESTION.

"**A**RE there no further joys to be experienced, than what arise from the hope of the gospel?"—Answer. There are no true joys but the joys of the Holy Ghost; and the only way in which he leads to joy unspeakable and full of glory, is by testifying of the things of Christ which are written in the word of truth: so that unless the joys which we have are founded upon, or flow from the hope set before us in the gospel, we have great reason to think they are not the joys of the Holy Ghost. Rom. v. 3. 1. Cor. xiii. 6. Psalm v. 11. But it will be inquired, "Am I to take no joy from perceiving the work of God in my soul distinguishing me from others? And can I come to no other certainty of my personal interest in Christ than what arises from the belief of the gospel proclaimed equally to all?" In reply to this it is needful to inquire, whether your conscience bear witness, before God who knoweth all things, that Christ as the free refuge of the guilty is your only hope, the free promise of life thro' his name your only encouragement to draw near to God, and his righteousness your only title to heaven. If this be not the case, it is in vain for you to look for any other kind of joy; for

for it is impossible there should be any distinguishing evidences, or genuine experience in the soul, till Christ is formed there the hope of glory; without this all our duties are legal and selfish, and our hope and experience delusive. But if you have the testimony of your conscience before God, that the blood of Christ gives you peace, and that all the blessings you hope for, are viewed as *the reward of his work*; if the free gospel comforts, quickens, and rejoices your heart; then you must be in a measure conscious, that Christ alone is your life, light, peace, and joy; and that of course a vital union is formed between your soul and him; and this being accompanied by the genuine spirit of the gospel, and the fruits of righteousness, it is confirmed, so far as this evidence goes, that you are born of God; and to the truth of this the Holy Spirit bears witness, by showing that these are the genuine internal and external effects of understanding the truth of Christ, under a consciousness of which, you may rejoice that *your name is written in heaven*; bless God for his distinguishing grace, and take comfort from, and rejoice in the doctrines of election, final perseverance, and eternal glorification. But even in this the true believer does not lose sight of the common salvation, nor does he build his assurance of eternal life, either upon his experiences, or the fruits of his life. This is an important point of doctrine, and should be well considered.

The believer is assured, by the gospel testimony, that eternal life is inseparably connected with the belief of the truth; so that he that believes *SHALL* be saved. He looks upon the genuine effects of the gospel, only as proving his connection with Christ, or that he is a child of God by faith in him, and then justly argues, *If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*. He does not view his experience or obedience as an intervening righteousness intiating him to Christ and eternal life, and therefore

therefore does not assure himself of reigning in life by virtue of them; nor yet does he appropriate heaven, &c. without evidence either from scripture, sense, or reason that he has a right to make such a claim. The christian's hope of eternal life, is founded upon HIS word who cannot lie; but unless there is substantial evidence of a personal connection with Christ, the assurance thereof is groundless and vain; for as the gospel ascertains the certainty of eternal salvation to none but believers of the truth, so unless we have the witness of the Spirit of God with our spirits (Rom. viii. 16. 1. John iii. 20. 21) that we are of the truth, our assurance that Christ shed his blood for us in particular, and that of course eternal life is infallibly ours, is void of scriptural foundation. As the first Epistle of John was professedly written that *believers may know* that they had eternal life, the best way will be to take no man's opinion about the way by which we are to come to this knowledge, but each for himself consult that Epistle. We have been told, by those who deny the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the gospel effectual, that "the appropriating act is necessary to a consciousness, knowledge, and enjoyment of the divine righteousness," which is consistent enough with their own plan; because as that righteousness stands in the scriptures it is proclaimed indefinitely to the world, and therefore must need some power to give it efficacy to individuals, and they maintain, as above, that their appropriating act does this; whereas all who are taught of God in hearing the divine report concerning this righteousness, well know that it is not any working of their mind (whether it be called acting faith, appropriation, or by any other name) that gives knowledge, consciousness, or enjoyment of it; but that the Spirit of truth, taking of the things of Christ which are written, and opening the understanding thereby, performs every divine operation, and draws forth

forth every evangelical act, whether of mind or body. But if any professor of the gospel so far forgets the only ground of hope and confidence before God, as to take pleasure in the exercises of his own mind, and lives by his privileges, or the change within him, he so far is guilty of criminal indulgences, and rejoices in the flesh; which cannot be done but at the expence of turning aside from Christ.

QUESTION.

“What are the proper uses believers should make of their experiences?”—It has before been shown what the genuine experience of the gospel is, and its happy and salutary effects upon the practice; the sum of which is, that the ATONEMENT known and believed gives rest to the guilty conscience; the saved sinner lives daily by his faith, or that which the dying Redeemer declared FINISHED, and walks as becometh the gospel of Christ. Without these things are more or less known by us, we are not, at present, christians: we have no right to believe that we are so ourselves, nor has any one authority to believe it of us. Not the *former*, because the witness of our conscience, and that of the Spirit of God are against us: to persuade ourselves of it therefore, is not only to believe without evidence which is absurd; but also against the strongest evidence to the contrary. Not the *latter*, because the rule given to judge and be judged by is, *By their fruits ye shall know them*. Without noticing the use commonly made of false joys, false confidence, &c. it may be observed that a believer might make the following use of his experiences, viz. (1st) What inward experience he has of the body of sin and death, the opposition of the flesh to the gospel, and the deceitfulness, pride, and enmity of his heart; should be used as a prevailing argument for the necessity of looking daily to the blood of Christ, for healing, cleansing, and pardon. (2) The trials in providence

dence that he meets with, the losses, disappointments, persecutions, and sufferings which he is called to endure, should be used as so many proofs that this is not his rest, that he should not lay up for himself treasure upon the earth, but be daily *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* (3) The precious, peaceful, and comfortable experience of the truth, he should use as a confirming evidence of the gospel, which he has believed upon the testimony of God. For he finds that to be true by blessed experience that he before received upon the authority of scripture. John iv. 42. chap. viii. 30—32. (4) He may also use his experience of the gospel, both his peace of conscience and his observance of those things that Christ has commanded, as a proof that his faith is not false or feigned, nor his hope in Christ vain. Rom. v. 1. 1. John ii. 3. (5) He may use his experience to lead him to the *cause* of it, when he needs a revival of it in his soul. But here let me be understood. I do not mean that he should renew his enjoyments by reflecting upon his former experiences; or that upon the ground of them, or through them, either as a medium, occasion, or circumstance, he should argue his right, or make his claim to present comfort: but simply this is intended; namely, that he may trace the streams up to the fountain; or by recollecting that Christ and his salvation are the source of all joy, peace, rest, and comfort; when he feels the want of these things he may apply to Christ to renew them, under the same character, upon the same ground, and with the same views as he at first looked unto him for salvation. All who are taught of God, are taught, as guilty sinners, constantly to live by the Righteousness of the Redeemer, which is perfectly consistent with a full persuasion of personal interest in him.

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“Does the gospel hope admit of taking relief, under fresh charges of guilt upon the conscience, from any former works or experiences; or any present feelings or resolutions?” From what has been already observed it is answered in the *negative*; for if any thing appears in the temper and walk of a professor, that the word of God condemns; he ought on that account to examine himself whether he be in the faith, according to 2. Cor. xiii. 5. and indeed if but a small portion of the fear of God be before his eyes; and his conscience remain tender, a suspicion of this will force itself upon his mind, whether he chuses to entertain it or no. But the question requires a more distinct reply. (1) There is nothing that persons are more deceived in than their *feelings*. Christ tells us of some whose joy, while it lasted, no one could question the truth of. Math. xiii. 20. Luke iv. 20—30. And have not we seen many making a shining profession of religion, persons who have been high in our esteem as christians, and the relation of whose experiences has often given us pleasure: who yet have turned back, and been a sad disgrace to religion, yea even to society? And is it not plain from hence, and abundantly confirmed by the word of God, that professors may have false hopes, false confidence, false comforts, and false joys, even while they have made the clearest profession in words? And if this be the case, then would it not be confirming the delusion, and sealing the destruction of such, to endeavor to comfort them, and cause them to think well of their state from their former supposed experiences, or works, or present desires, or resolutions? But to say the best of this method, it is *uncertain*, and therefore uncomfortable and unsafe; for seeing there have been persons who have been deceived this way, the leaders of this people set themselves to divide and sub-

sub-divide betwixt this *kind* of conviction, and the other—these kind of desires, repentances, and faith, and those which have been disproved; yet after all, many are held in sad suspense through life, and awfully prove the deficiency of this hope and comfort in death! And as few are capable of making the necessary distinctions, their comfort, in general, depends upon their leaders, not upon God's testimony.—But (2) The present situation the mind is supposed to be in, is an objection to this method of procedure. For this state of mind renders a former *real* experience *apparently* delusive, and so cannot give relief: no not even upon the supposition that a persuasion of our election will give peace to a guilty conscience. Because the very ground of the proposed encouragement, or source of relief, is called in question; and indeed if under a sense of guilt any can take relief from their past experience, that very satisfaction which he finds, should lead him to suspect the truth of his faith, hope and experience. For our past experiences are no otherwise evidenced to be the true joys of faith, and the real comforts of the Holy Ghost, than as the soul is disposed thereby to look directly to Christ alone for peace, when his conscience is charged with fresh guilt. (3) To make use of any former works or experiences, or any present feelings or resolutions to this end, is *in its own nature* wrong. I suppose it will be admitted that fresh contracted guilt tends to work in the soul fear, darkness, and distress, which, as before observed render a former *real* experience *apparently* delusive. But if this were not the case, can our past experiences, however genuine, remove the *ground* of our present fear, darkness, and distress? If so, then we have found out something different from the blood of Christ, that can cleanse us from all sin! But supposing it possible, that a retrospect of our past experiences could remove the present sense of guilt, &c. what sense can we make of such an address

to believers as the following, *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.* Col. ii. 6. A sinner does not at *first* receive Christ thro' the medium of his experiences, or upon the ground of his own working under any consideration whatever; but rather as Christ is freely given a sanctuary for the distressed, and upon the unqualified hope of the guilty. If then, when guilt burthens the conscience again, we can get relief from any other quarter, than we did at first; that is, through any other medium than the gospel of the grace of God, we must certainly obtain it at the expence of turning out of the way to God; and instead of *holding the beginning of our confidence* (which if well-founded must be in Christ) *steadfast unto the end*, as we are exhorted. Heb. iii. 14. we are *moved away from the hope of the gospel.* Col. 1. 23. to another hope and another gospel: *Which indeed is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would PERVERT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* (Gal. i. 6. 9.) In short, if a believer can at any time take relief in this way, to say the least of it, he does not obey the exhortation to walk in Christ as he first received him. But it must be acknowledged this method of giving peace to the guilty conscience, is consistent enough with that doctrine which teaches the necessity of certain pre-requisites to qualify us for receiving Christ. But, (4) this method tends to give us slight notions of sin; which is a sufficient argument against it if no other could be urged. It leads professors to think that *their* sins are not infinitely criminal, and as such deserve the wrath of God: which sentiment is purely *Antinomian*, and so, is opposed to Jehovah's moral government. Nor can any person have the fear of God before his eyes, who entertains such thoughts of sin. If every defect in loving God with all our hearts is infinitely criminal, as without doubt it is, then the fear arising from a consciousness of it cannot be removed
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by any thing less, than an atonement of infinite dignity and worth. Hence we may see one reason, why the christian should live daily by the faith of the Son of God. (5) There is no *occasion* for such a procedure. For even while we view nothing about ourselves, but what leads to despair, yet against all hope from *within ourselves*, we may believe in hope of what is set before us *in the gospel*. It cannot be proved by any logical deduction, of one proposition from another, or a taking for granted certain premises, and then drawing rational conclusions from them, that we are believers in Christ, unless we rest in the persuasion, that *He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him*, and that the gospel is good tidings of great joy to ALL PEOPLE; and if the sufficiency and freeness of the Redeemer's work is believed; and thereby a persuasion arises in the soul from the faithfulness of God, that whosoever believeth shall be saved; that person will find no necessity to look to any other quarter for peace. But if our knowledge and belief of these things do not bring peace, without doubt we do not believe them; or to speak the most cautiously, we have our minds sadly clouded about them. In short, if we could reconcile our minds, to attend to the direction of God himself, we should see that he proposes nothing, to renew or revive the peace and joy of the most eminent saint, but that which he sets before the most guilty sinner, which may be seen, 2. Cor. xii. 8. 9. Rev. i. 17. 18.

Obj. "But did not David in a time of trouble and sorrow seek comfort and peace in referring to his past experiences?" (Psalm xlii. 5. 11. Psalm xliii. 5) In reply to this it may be observed, that these Psalms seem to have been composed by the same author, and upon the same occasion: probably David was the author of them, who at this time was banished from the House of God, either by Saul's tyranny or Absalom's rebellion. He longs to be restored to the

worship of God, with as much ardor as the long-chafed Hart, ready to expire, pants for the water-brooks. He looks back to the happiness he was used to enjoy in going to the house of the Lord, and contrasts it with his present forlorn situation: the effect whereof is that *his soul is cast down within him*. However he is far from looking to, or expecting help from *himself* or any *human aids*; but in the midst of his grief he encourages himself *in the Lord*. He looks to his works of providence (ver. 6.) which are the ground upon which he exhorts his soul to (ver. 1.) *hope in God*; even as he at another time says, "Because thou has been my help, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." If therefore this might be applied to christian-experience, it is a suitable direction in what way we should proceed to renew our comforts (viz) looking from ourselves, and upon the ground of the faithful word, which records the mighty acts of the Lord, hope in his mercy, and confide in his veracity.

The penman of Psalm lxxvii. had so far forgot himself as to look to his former experiences to relieve him, under the sense of present guilt; but found the method fail in the trial. Ver. 1—4. he gives a distressing view of that which troubled his conscience, and ver. 5. 6. he tries what looking to his past enjoyments would do for him. *I have considered the days of old, the years of antient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.* Thus we see he took the same method that is commonly recommended to, and practised by professors in our day. But his conscience was too sensibly affected with the wrath that lay upon it, to take comfort from any such quarter—still he complains, ver. 7. 9. Convinced, in the trial, of the folly of this method he acknowledges his error ver. 10. *And I said this is my infirmity.* He tries another expedient ver. 10—20. this is opposed to ver. 5. 6. This method then is quite

quite the reverse of the former. Instead of looking to his former experience, his song in the night, &c. he looks now to the wonderful works of God, which were a type of the spiritual redemption by the greatest of all the divine works. If then we count the Psalmist a pattern worthy to be imitated, let us follow his example, cease from this former fruitless method of looking for relief, and renew our joys, by looking to the *finished work* of the Redeemer.

To conclude : to know the truth as it is in Jesus, is to be *wise unto salvation*. To experience its genuine influences upon our souls, is to be *truly happy*. And to contend earnestly for it, against every opposition to it, or subtle corruption of it, is the Christian's highest honor. To profess the faith without enjoying the genuine effects of it, is to have the *form* without the *power* of godliness. To talk of experience without a scriptural knowledge of the Son of God, is *mere enthusiasm*. And the most flaming profession of knowledge and experience without observing the things that Christ has commanded, is nothing better than a miserable delusion.

T H E E N D .

E R R A T A.

Page 17	Line 14	for was	read were
—	33	— ibid	— ibid
50	19	dile in	
56	14	dile lie	
58	19	for hypothesises	read hypotheses
—	22	— Beliel	— Belial
70	22	— (:)	make (,)
102	4	— truly	read true by
105	39	— doctrine	— doctrines
142	2	— spirit	— spirit
155	4	— the subjects	— yet the subjects.
27	27	brightness	brightness
54	16	done	down
64	39	that	than
76	27	soul	sinner
94	29	is	his
105	39	doctrine	poetione
123	5	foundation	foundation

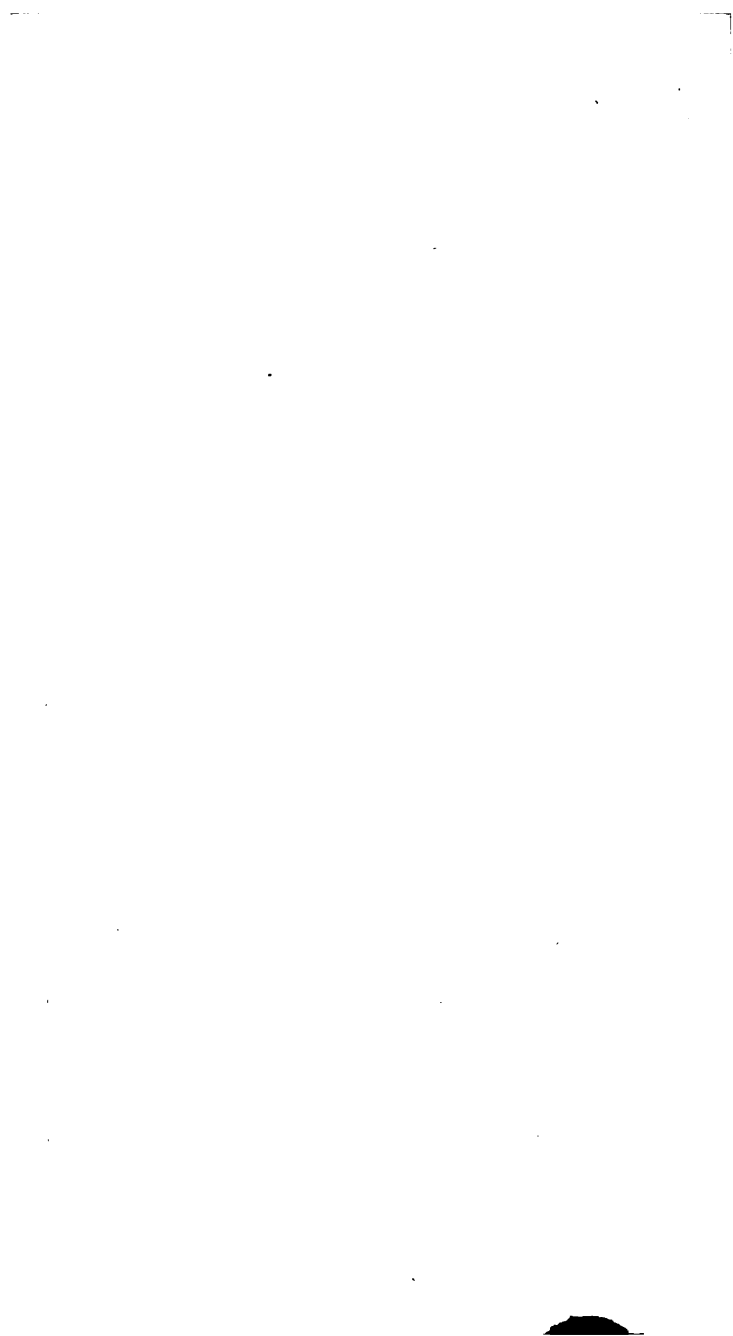


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